

**Building critical reflexivity through life story work**

By

**LYNN MARGARET NORTON**

RESEARCH THESIS

Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in

**PSYCHOLOGY**

in the

**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**  
**(School of Applied Human Sciences)**


at the

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**SUPERVISOR:** Professor Yvonne Sliep

### SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I, **PROFESSOR YVONNE SLIEP**, as the candidates Supervisor agree to the submission of this thesis.

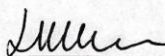
Signed 

Date 15/01/2018

### DECLARATION

I, **LYNN M NORTON**, declare as follows:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:  
[a] their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;  
[b] where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced.
5. Where I have reproduced a publication of which I am author, co-author or editor, I have indicated which part of the publication was actually written by myself alone and have fully referenced such publications.
6. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the references sections.

Signed 

Date 15/01/2018

L M NORTON (Student number: 831837667)

## **DEDICATION**

For my family, past and present, who are always a part of my endeavours.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This research would not have been possible without the unending support of my supervisor, Professor Yvonne Sliap. I am immensely grateful and thankful to her for her encouragement, creativity, and for sharing her vast knowledge, experience and guiding intuition with me. This research emerged through endless dialogues and shared insights that went beyond expectation to enable a PhD journey that was an inspiring and meaningful experience. I am privileged to have worked with her.

I am also very thankful to all those who shared in and supported this journey:

The Health Promotion and Communication Department and the students at UKZN who shared their stories and experiences so willingly;

Peter Buhendwa who made it possible to become involved in the community project and spent endless time giving invaluable support and advice in this project;

The teen participants in the youth programme who shared their insights, stories, drama and poetry;

Kassa Barakamfitye who was as a valuable research assistant in the community project, giving of her time, knowledge and support; and

The NIHSS (National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences) for their scholarship support and for providing valuable educational guidance and encouragement throughout the research process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUPERVISORS DECLARATION.....	i
DECLARATION.....	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES AND ACRONYMS.....	vii
NOTES.....	viii
ABSTRACT.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background and context of study.....	1
1.2 Research Objectives and Questions.....	3
1.3 Problem statement: Where’s the gap?.....	3
1.4 Process of research.....	7
1.4.1 Overview of process.....	7
1.4.2 Story of Self: An autoethnographic reflexive study.....	8
1.4.3 Story of Education: Bringing context and lived experiences into the learning space.....	9
1.4.4 Story of Practice: Refugee youth as a community of HP practice.....	9
1.5 Literature Overview.....	10
1.5.1 Introduction.....	10
1.5.2 What is critical reflexivity?.....	11
1.5.3 Why critical reflexivity?.....	14
1.5.3.1 Researcher reflexivity.....	14
1.5.3.2 Self-reflexivity.....	16
1.5.3.3 Critical reflexivity in education and professional practice.....	16
1.5.3.4 Critical reflexivity in community practice.....	17
1.5.4 Life stories.....	19
1.5.4.1 Making sense of our lives and our identity.....	19
1.5.4.2 Stories in context.....	20
1.5.4.3 From storytelling towards empowerment and agency.....	21
1.5.4.4 Collective storytelling: From social support to social change.....	22
1.5.5 Connecting Stories and Reflexivity.....	24

1.6 Conclusion: Structure of Thesis.....	25
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	28
2.1 Research Design.....	28
2.2 Theoretical Positioning.....	28
2.3 Conceptual framework.....	32
2.4 Methods and Procedure: Data collection, analysis and presentation.....	37
2.5 Creative Methodology.....	39
2.6 Reflexive Supervision.....	40
2.7 Trustworthiness and responsibility.....	40
2.8 Ethical Considerations.....	43
2.9 Conclusion.....	45
CHAPTER 3: STORY OF SELF.....	47
3.1 Introduction.....	47
3.2 Story of Self: An Autoethnographic reflexive study.....	48
Paper 1: Norton: Pathways of Reflection: Creating Voice Through Life Story and Dialogical Poetry.....	49
CHAPTER 4: STORY OF EDUCATION.....	74
4.1 Introduction.....	74
4.2 Exploring the value of using a critical reflexive model in health education.....	75
Paper 2: Norton & Sliep: A critical reflexive model: Working with life stories in Health Promotion Education.....	76
4.3 A case study highlighting research methodology.....	107
Paper 3: Norton & Sliep: The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education.....	108
4.4 From the personal to the professional: Does reflexivity last?.....	136
Paper 4: Norton & Sliep: Hindsight and foresight for better insight.....	137
CHAPTER 5: STORY OF PRACTICE.....	159
5.1 Introduction.....	159
5.2 Story of Practice: Participatory action research with refugee youth.....	160
Paper 5: Norton & Sliep: #WE SPEAK: Exploring the experience of refugee youth through participatory research and poetry to facilitate voice.....	161
5.3 Dissemination of Results: Keeping the conversation open.....	204
CHAPTER 6: SYNTHESIS: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	205
6.1 Introduction: Inter-Connecting Insights.....	205
6.2 A theory of and for change.....	211

6.3 The CR Evaluation Guide.....	217
6.3.1 Introduction to the guide.....	217
6.3.2 Purpose and aim of guide.....	218
6.3.3 Development of guide.....	219
6.3.4 The guide in practice.....	224
6.4 Going Forward: Contribution of thesis and recommendations.....	229
6.5 Limitations and challenges.....	232
6.6 On Reflection – What about the dark side?.....	233
6.7 Conclusion.....	238
REFERENCES.....	240

## LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES AND ACRONYMS

### FIGURES

Figure 1:	Process of research	7
Figure 2:	Theoretical positioning	32
Figure 3:	Critical Reflexive Model	34
Figure 4:	Narrative paradigm in reflexivity framework	34
Figure 5:	Overview of CR process in terms of CR Model	35
Figure 6:	Dialogical Reflexive Research Process	46

### TABLES

Table 1:	Narrative reflexivity: Linking biography to inter-relational reflexivity	25
Table 2:	Theoretical underpinnings supporting CR Model development	36
Table 3:	Overview of practical application of CR Model	37
Table 4:	An overview of research methodology	38
Table 5:	Overview of validation techniques used throughout the study	43
Table 6:	Overview of shifting positions and emerging constructs in 3 phases of research	209
Table 7:	Summary of CR Model in terms of Theory of Change evaluation	217
Table 8:	CR Evaluation Guide	225

### ACRONYMS

CCM:	Critical Communicative Methodology
CST:	Critical Social Theory
CR Model:	Critical Reflexive Model
CR Evaluation Guide:	Critical Reflexive Evaluation Guide
HP Masters:	Health Promotion and Communication Masters
PP Module:	Personal is the Professional module
SA:	South Africa
UKZN:	University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa



## **NOTES**

[1] The reference section at the end of this thesis includes references for Chapters 1, 2 and 6 and for the introductory sections of Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

[2] References for each published or submitted paper appear at the end of each article according to the referencing style relevant to the specific journal.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates what happens when space is facilitated in a number of settings for the development of critical reflexivity through narrative practices and other related reflexive and dialogical methodology. In a broad sense the research examines the transformative effects of life story work and reflexivity, to track outcomes and the conditions under which they are enabled. Although there is much existing literature on reflexivity, recent research suggests that there is little consistency across educational strategies and among health professions generally. There is also a paucity of evidence-based guidance for educators, which, combined with a lack of clarity across the literature on a clearly defined conceptualisation of the term ‘reflexivity’ makes it difficult for newcomers to the field or educators across disciplines to put reflexive strategies into place. In addition there is little translation of how reflexivity, once obtained, can be translated into practice; and also in regard to its facilitation in a community context. The research aims to deconstruct ways to facilitate critical reflexivity in order to promote accessibility, transferability and evaluation. The ongoing impact of South Africa’s colonial and apartheid history has resulted in continued inequality and social divisions making it crucial for these challenges to be urgently and critically addressed. In terms of education we need to look beyond Eurocentric content knowledge and towards a critical reflection of our assumptions and long held beliefs in terms of our history, current local complexities, and future possibilities. This can be aided through the use of life stories to link new knowledge to lived experience, and to work towards building an African centred identity that embraces diversity while taking into account the rich indigenous knowledge systems that are part of this landscape.

The research design is qualitative in nature and grounded in social constructionist principles applied within a narrative theory and dialogical approach. This fits well with a transformative agenda with a focus on social justice to guide the research in light of the South African context in which it is embedded. The study follows a phased and reflexive research process that explores critical reflexivity on three levels: the self in terms of personal and professional development; in education; and in community practice. The process begins with an autoethnographic study of the researcher’s experience of working with her life story and reflexivity, which is followed in the educational phase with a focus on tertiary education and tracks the experience of a number of students involved in an educational module that uses life stories to develop critical reflexivity in health promotion. In the final phase, the researcher applies this work in community practice with refugee youth from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, living in Durban, South Africa.

A Critical Reflexive Model is used and developed as a conceptual framework throughout the research, and is examined in the final chapter as a theory of change that guides the development of reflexivity and is assessed for its value in taking this work forward in an accessible way. The results of the

research show not only the transformative benefits of developing critical reflexivity through life story work in terms of self, relational, and contextual development but also the complexity of, and shortcomings in, evaluating a reflexive programme or intervention. Using the results of the data and the Critical Reflexive Model the researcher develops a comprehensive guide to evaluating such programmes and also to assess the benefits for participants, using Blooms Revised Taxonomy as an educational foundation to guide the process. The researcher concludes that the Critical Reflexive Model, together with the evaluation guide and life story methodology examined in this research, offers an accessible and beneficial 'reflexive package' or guide to educators or professionals wanting to develop critical reflexivity, whether as educators with students across disciplines as an important aspect of developing reflexive practitioners, or as part of their community practice.

# CHAPTER 1

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and context of study

The purpose of this research is to explore what happens when space is facilitated in a number of settings for the development of critical reflexivity through story-telling and other related reflexive methodology. In a broad sense, the research explores the possible transformative effects of life story work and reflexivity to track outcomes and the conditions under which they are enabled. The influence of these understandings in relation to self-development, education (with an emphasis on the practice of health promotion education), and community practice is examined as part of a phased and reflexive research process.

There are a number of ways of defining reflexivity and I detail this in the literature review in chapter 2, but begin here with offering my understanding that stems from experiencing reflexivity throughout the research process and the definitions in the literature that fit well with this experience. I view reflexivity broadly as an ability or skill to better understand how we act in the world, why we hold certain views and beliefs, and how we think about our lives. This understanding arises through a deep realisation that our realities are shaped by our past and present interactions with others and our surroundings, and how we view these interactions. Once we realise this, we become open to the possibility that we can look at our lives differently and can re-shape our stories. As these understandings arise in social interaction this process is inter-relational and contextual. It involves a better understanding not just of ourselves but also of others and our social context, which opens pathways for living a more harmonious and socially accountable life. Reflexivity is therefore inextricably woven into the stories we tell our about lives, and is embodied in the different versions we expose about who we are, what we believe, and what we are capable of. It is a lifelong skill that can be learned, should be nurtured, changes the way you see things and means that you will begin to question everything. It is not necessarily comfortable (gone are your rose-tinted shades and self-assured beliefs) but has the potential to make you a better researcher, scholar, professional - one who challenges her own version of reality, and thereby enables her to become also a more socially responsible citizen of the world who is better placed to embrace the multiple strata of viewpoints and beliefs held by those around us.

The potential that arises from developing reflexivity to live a more meaningful life is viewed here as a practical and essential skill that can be developed in any individual. It may not be a simple, quick process, but it is something that can be taught and learned. In my research I show this through a process that involves first experiencing reflexivity for myself and then grappling with it in an

educational and community context. Reflexivity has been well recognised as an essential skill in qualitative research and is considered crucial in a number of disciplines especially relating to the helping or care professions. However, as I indicate below in outlining the problem statement for this research, recent findings indicate that there is still a lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the term “reflexivity” and a lack of evidence to guide educators in the development of reflexivity in students and practitioners. Through this research I show the value of providing a dynamic, theoretical framework as a base for analysing, developing and evaluating reflexivity; and provide a number of tools and processes for making reflexivity accessible, useful, and applicable across a number of contexts.

Central to these processes is linking reflexivity to our life stories by critically appraising our lived experience. Bruner (2004) argues that our life narratives are by their nature reflexive as we are both narrator and central figure in our stories; and also that they reflect the dominant theories about “possible lives” in a particular culture. Signifying the power that our stories have on how we live our lives, he states:

[E]ventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very “events” of a life. In the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives (p. 694)

Using personal stories as a way of developing reflexivity is significant as it broadens the scope of reflexivity and invites all people (not just academics) to cultivate this ability and to see themselves within the bigger story. This is because we are all able to and do tell stories – we do this all the time. In terms of Bruner’s view above, as long as we are telling stories about ourselves, we are also appraising ourselves within our story, how we are acting, what we are saying and doing. This may be conscious or subconscious (or both), and can also change over time as how we tell our stories changes in the telling and with the audience. Storytelling is more than a form of communication, it is a sense-making tool that impacts our social interaction with others, helps us find meaning, constructs identities, and enables us to connect to the wider social world (Riessman, 2008). In this research I follow Frank’s (2010) approach and consider what storytelling “does” and view stories as “actors” that can shape what we do and who we become rather than trying to discover the mind of the storyteller (p. 13). Storytelling and reflexivity are interrogated as tools for better understanding our view of the world (our realities), so that we can understand others and our social contexts to become better researchers, students, practitioners (*people*).

## **1.2 Research Objectives and Questions**

The overall aim of the research is to explore what happens when a dialogical space is facilitated for critical reflexivity through life story work within an educational and practice context. The research questions how working with life stories in education and in a community context develops critical reflexivity, in what ways, and asks what benefits result from this.

Sub-objectives:

- [1] To explore the experience of critical reflexivity developed through life story work to better understand the self, others and practice in context.
- [2] To explore what emerges as important constructs as a result of critical reflexivity developed through working with life stories.
- [3] To explore any shifts in position of self in relation to others and practice in context as a result of critical reflexivity.

Research Questions:

- [1] What happens when space is created for critical reflexivity through story-telling?
- [2] What important constructs emerge as a result of working with life stories to build critical reflexivity?
- [3] How does positioning of self in relation to others and practice in context practice change as a result of critical reflexivity?

## **1.3 Problem statement: Where's the gap?**

Reflexivity has a great number of positive qualities and outcomes across a number of contexts. Sinacore, Blaisure, Justin, Healy & Brawer (1999) describe reflexivity as leading to “self-awareness, scholarly accountability, and recognition of a range of human truths” (p. 267). Probst (2015) summarises the benefits of reflexivity in qualitative social work research, which despite a number of challenges, are many and include: “accountability, trustworthiness, richness, clarity, ethics, support, and personal growth – beneficial for the integrity of the research process, the quality of knowledge generated, the ethical treatment of those being studied, and the researcher’s own well-being and personal growth” (p. 42). As stated above, however, there are numerous ways of defining and viewing reflexivity and it is not always clear what form of reflexivity is being used or the processes followed.

There are also numerous ideas about how to develop it in a number of situations, particularly research (Berger, 2013; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenback & Cunliffe, 2014) and more recently in education across various disciplines, for example, in teaching (Feucht, Brownlee & Schraw, 2017); social work (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Graham, 2017; Morley, 2015); management studies and practice (Cunliffe, 2002; Cunliffe, 2004); leadership (Eriksen, 2009); organisations (Fook & Gardner, 2007); health promotion (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Landy et al., 2016); psychology (Sinacore et al., 1999); media and communication (Faulkner, Kaunert, Kluch, Koc & Trotter, 2016; and multicultural communication (Nagata, 2004) among others. It has also been found to be useful in a community context (Slied & Gilbert, 2007) and is considered important although underutilised in terms of community psychology (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000; Reed, Miller, Nnawulezi and Valenti, 2012). However, a recent scoping study by Landy et al. (2016) exploring educational strategies that have been designed to augment reflexivity within the health professions found there was great diversity and a lack of consistency across educational strategies and among health professions generally. The study also found that there is little evidence-based guidance for educators which, combined with a lack of clarity across the literature on a clearly defined conceptualisation of the term 'reflexivity', makes it difficult for newcomers to the field or educators across disciplines to put reflexive strategies into place. The authors conclude that: "Future research is crucial for exploring processes related to the development of reflexivity" (para. 30). This is also noted by White, Fook & Gardner (2006) who confirm that there is a lack of "empirical evidence of the value and outcomes of a reflective process" (p. 18) and their review of the literature "highlights the relatively under-researched nature of reflection, given its extensive use" (p. 19). As noted above there is also an apparent lack of application of reflexivity in community practice, and strategies that can be applied easily and usefully by educators and practitioners across disciplines, and community developers are still needed.

Overall, if, because of its value, we would like to advance reflexivity across multiple disciplines and for the purpose of self-development, we need to find ways to make it broadly accessible, useful and applicable across contexts. There are by now many useful and interesting projects, studies and educational strategies that offer ideas about developing reflexivity in a number of settings and contexts. For example: Cunliffe, 2004 (management education strategies for critical reflexivity); Eriksen, 2009 (practical reflexivity and authentic leadership); Fook & Askeland, 2007 ('critical incidents' in professional practice); Fook and Gardner, 2007 (practising critical reflection in teaching and organisational practice); Graham, 2017 (reflective practice learning in social work); Nagata, 2004 (self-reflexivity in intercultural communication); Faulkner et al., 2016 (arts-based research exercises); Sinacore et al., 1999 (strategies in counselling and psychology of women courses); and Taylor, Rudolph & Foldy, 2008 (reflective practice in action inquiry). White et al., (2006) also cite examples of the many reflective techniques used overtime including journaling, on-line discussions, reflective conversations, case studies, stories, fiction, poems, metaphors and movement. These authors,

however, note the importance of considering the effectiveness of these in terms of a proper understanding of reflective practice and its purpose within the relevant context and culture.

The plethora of literature in the field makes it a complex and diverse area to navigate across different disciplines and to apply for specific needs, not only for choosing particular methods but also in terms of the varied research approaches in which these are applied (White et al., 2006). In developing a resource book for “Practising Critical Reflection” in organisations, Fook and Gardner (2007) also note the valued body of material that exists in the literature but in light of the complexities of the field are of the view that “there is room and need for many different ways of understanding, theorising and practising critical reflection” (p. x). Therefore, despite what appears to be an abundance of methods to enhance reflection and reflexivity, there still appears to be a gap in offering a largely generic and practical way to develop reflexivity that is theoretically based and has been evaluated for its benefits and efficacy.

Each context offers its own complexities that impact the purpose, process and meaning of critical reflexivity for those involved. These complexities and the cultural differences of those involved needs to be taken into account (Fook & Askeland, 2007). This is particularly pertinent in a diverse South African (SA) context with the ongoing impact of our colonial and apartheid history and resultant continued inequality and social divisions. Leibowitz, Swartz, Bozalek, Carolissen, Nicholls and Rohleder (2012) highlight the importance of these divisions and differences in our society in terms of education and the need for these challenges to be critically addressed. They stress the need to “unlock dialogue on differences and identity among students” (p. xii) and share the results of their Community, Self and Identity (CSI) project highlight this need. Leibowitz (2012), as part of the CSI project, focuses specifically on understanding the challenges of the SA education landscape and the importance of ‘citizenship’ and educational contributions to the wellbeing of our society. She emphasises that there are numerous challenges at a number of levels for both students and educators, including: nationally (funding and expenditure), at an institutional level (socio-historical factors including inequality and segregation), and the individual level (inequalities in relation to financial support, prior education, access to education, cultural capital and language, and ‘outsider’ academic identity). Leibowitz (2012) concludes that despite the value of international literature and theory on aspects such as racism, multiculturalism, and diversity they “are not sufficient to help us plan the way forward... Thus we need to ask ourselves, what can we learn from other settings? What strategies do we need to devise for ourselves, given our particular set of social and material relationships?” (p. 14). This is important and shows the need not only for a critical reflexivity overall in education but an approach that fits with our context. As we are asked through a critical reflexive process to explore our assumptions and long held beliefs, in an SA context we must explore these in our history, our current local complexities, and our future hopes.



Du Preez, Simmonds and Verhoef (2016), in a recent meta-study concerned with transformation in higher education in SA, highlight the ‘crucial’ need for research on “the internationalisation debates informing the higher education context in order to broaden the discourse on transformation and encourage the rethinking thereof” and the need for interdisciplinary research beyond education to “rethink” and research transformation (p. 7). If we are looking at change from ‘within’ the educational system, at present there appears to be much room for inviting dialogue and conversations about ‘our’ issues into the learning space. Developing critical reflexivity through life stories in education is considered a way to do this in a participatory and interactive way that includes students’ contextual histories and complexities. Waghid (2009) calls for ‘democratic deliberation’ in African higher education and stresses that:

[U]niversity staff should not merely listen to the narratives of students, but actually encourage a spirit of living together in diversity – that is, through democratic deliberation university staff and students together establish opportunities which take into account people’s linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious commonalities and diversity. The idea of finding a deliberative space for sharing of different people’s commonalities is based on the understanding that people need to learn to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own (p. 75).

Creating such a ‘deliberative space’ to share both similar and completing stories, to engage dialogically and reflexively, in turn creates an opportunity for people to co-exist (Waghid, 2009). Bringing personal life stories (context) and dialogue into the learning space is considered one of the ways of establishing such an ‘opportunity’ that needs to be evaluated and explored.

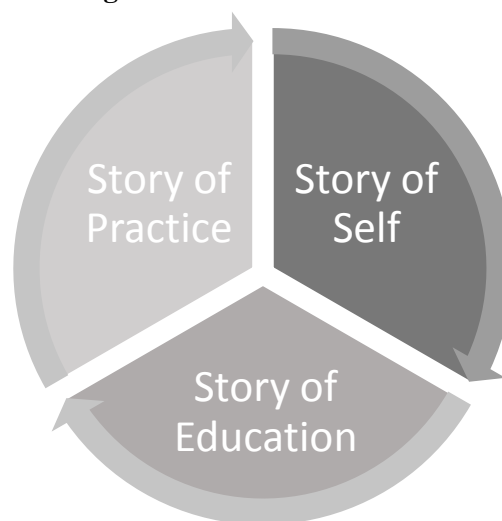
The intention of this research has been to interrogate the use of life stories as a tool for developing reflexivity in a number of settings. This began with an exploration in tertiary education but developed to include consideration of self-development, and application in a community context. Each context comes with its own different ecological complexities and so this is not an attempt to create a template, but rather to examine the use of life stories, how they “act” to enable reflexivity and to do this using a theoretically-based and contextual approach. In this way, I hope to reveal how the sharing of personal stories which are accessible to everyone (shared here in different settings – from the heart, in the lecture room, and a busy community church) can make things happen. I interrogate further what is “happening” when stories are shared, highlight the outcomes and then go back to scrutinise the methodology to find out more about the “how” and the “why.” In this sense the process of my research is itself reflexive and iterative, a going back and forth between methodology and outcomes in an attempt to appraise the process.

## 1.4 Process of research: A reflexive journey

### 1.4.1 Overview of process

The research follows a phased process that begins with the experience of my own life story work. This is followed by an in-depth study of the impact of storytelling and reflexivity in tertiary education, and finally I apply what I have learnt in community practice. Although the three phases appear distinct, the process of the research was iterative and each of the phases is part of a more holistic approach in a reflexive research journey (*see* Figure 1). Each part of the research informs all the others and is not sequential except for beginning the process with my own story to bring into sharp focus the need for researcher reflexivity, so that I could clearly position myself in terms of the research. My self-reflexivity is, however, re-visited throughout as I question and challenge my positioning in relation to research participants in all phases of the research and my subjectivity in regard to my findings and conclusions. It impacts the way I interact with the research itself and my overall approach throughout the journey. The theoretical foundations of my approach and the conceptual model and methodology used in the research are explored and developed as part of this process. Each story or phase exposes different aspects and outcomes of the methodology that are revealed through the experiences of the participants in the study by following dialogical, narrative and participatory approaches. I also highlight the use of creative methods that are used to elicit and deepen our insights (researchers and participants), including poetic inquiry and a number of reflexive experiential approaches to gather and analyse the data depending on the context. The results are woven together in the final chapter, connecting the stories and bringing the journey full circle.

**Figure 1: Process of Research**



### **1.4.2 Story of Self: An autoethnographic reflexive study**

I start with my own story and experience of reflexivity that began as a Health Promotion and Communication (HP) Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in South Africa (SA) in 2013. As part of the Masters course, students are required to do a module called the Personal is the Professional (the PP module), which uses experiential teaching and learning work involving life stories. The PP module aims to create learning spaces and opportunities for students to collectively construct and deconstruct their social worlds to better understand both their educational and societal contexts. This is done through reflexive exploration by the students of their histories (through life stories), lived experiences (critical learning incidences), current life challenges, and future professional aspirations (Sliep, 2010; Sliep & Kotze, 2007). I explored my experience of sharing and appraising my life story during the module, and the ongoing deconstruction of my life story work in dialogue with my academic supervisor over the research period through an autoethnographic study.

Autoethnography is a form of self-reflection and writing that invites voice on issues that are founded in direct experience (Gallardo, Furman & Kulkarni, 2009). A fairly common use of autoethnography involves a researcher analysing her experience of participating in research (McIlveen, 2008). This is a reflexive process in terms of which the researcher embeds herself “amidst theory and practice, and by way of intimate autobiographic account, explicates a phenomenon under investigation” (McIlveen, 2008, p. 1). The researcher’s personal experience is then connected to wider social and political understandings (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). This phase of the research focused on my own story of reflexivity and my journey into a new form of knowing through reflexive practice including life story work, dialogue and poetry. I used the heuristic inquiry framework developed by Clark Moustakas (1990) to deeply explore and synthesise this process and show how following a reflexive route early in the research has informed and continues to inform me as a researcher. The intention was two-fold: to provide a personal and unique experience of my reflexivity as an additional layer of understanding; and to place myself in a better position to carry out this research journey more authentically and more ethically, based on an embodied experience and a better understanding of who I am and how I position myself in this research. This is important in following a narrative approach because, as Clandinin & Caine (2008) point out: “As narrative inquirers seek to inquire into experience, they must begin their inquiries with narrative self-studies into their own experiences....autobiographical narrative inquiries are the starting points for initially shaping and deepening the research puzzle” (p.543).

### **1.4.3 Story in Education: Bringing context and lived experience into the learning space**

Building on my own story, I have done an in-depth study of the impact of storytelling and reflexivity in tertiary education by focussing on the experiences of other HP Master's students who have also been through the PP module. The investigation of this phase of the study forms part of a larger project exploring the importance of developing critical reflexivity in education at a tertiary level through the use of narrative metaphor, particularly through the telling, deconstructing, re-telling and witnessing of life stories. The research is focused on the development of critical reflexive professionals who can provide appropriate service to individuals, communities and societies. It aims to explore the value placed on teaching reflexivity through life stories with the overall purpose being to identify factors that promote critical reflexive thinking and to determine conditions that are necessary to achieve transformational learning.

Attention in this study has been given to the development of self, relational, and contextual reflexivity; and to the creation of critical voice and position through the authoring of life stories as part of a Masters group. The research was further aimed at finding out what contributions the PP module has made to both the personal and professional lives of students and to investigate issues relating to the exploration of the potentials that develop from following a participative, reflexive and relational approach in education. This has involved a reflexive interrogation of critical education discourse which is considered particularly necessary in a SA educational setting that offers a complex set of challenges for a multitude of reasons. Of relevance here is our colonial and apartheid history, the effects of which are still felt today in the unequal and inadequate access to education and the numerous risks involved in living in an uncertain society.

I have focused in this phase on the value of developing critical reflexivity through the deconstruction of life stories in the teaching and learning space to better equip students for personal and professional life, enabling a better understanding of themselves and the complexities of the society in which we live. I examine first the experiences of a group of students who completed the PP module during 2016, and then conduct a more in-depth case study of a foreign student's experience of sharing his story of exile. Finally, I explore the more lasting effects of reflexivity from an educational to a professional setting with a group of Masters students who did the PP module and have graduated from the HP Masters over a period of 12 years.

### **1.4.4 Story of Practice: Refugee youth as a community of HP practice**

In the final phase of the research, I applied what I learnt in community practice by conducting a participatory action research project with a group of refugee youth from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) living in Durban, SA. Despite a vast range of social, economic and mental health difficulties among refugee populations, these communities are marginalised and experience numerous

barriers to access services, especially mental health services. This is particularly true for refugee youth and intervention programmes that promote positive outcomes for youth have been deemed essential (Ellis, Miller, Baldwin & Abdi, 2011).

The aim of this project was to explore the value placed on facilitating reflexivity through a narrative methodology, with close attention paid to the facilitation of voice, agency, and social connection. We used a reflexive, participatory approach to create a safe space and opportunities for participants to collectively construct and deconstruct their social worlds to better understand and cope with their difficult societal contexts through local solutions. Such an approach means that there is a privileging of context and community rather than the more individualistic approaches of Western society. Working in this way makes space for the voices of marginalised people to become part of the co-construction of knowledge and contribute towards preferred outcomes for a more just society (Sliep, 2010). The youth were encouraged to share their life histories, lived experiences and current life challenges, and, following a strength-based approach, their aspirations. Through the process of sharing the participants were stimulated to re-discover stories of personal strength to open possibilities for building new preferred and hopeful stories. The methodology for participatory interventions with youth and the outcomes of the intervention were assessed and evaluated.

This phase of the research involved a focus on reflexivity at two levels. First, in relation to myself as a researcher and a professional in practice (facilitator in a community intervention); applying the critical reflexive skills that I had learnt as a student in HP and then through my autoethnographic exploration. Second, and on another level, the focus of the intervention was on developing reflexive skills in participants so that they were better able to navigate through their worlds and to build personal and group identity and agency. It became an iterative process of ‘using’ critical reflexivity to hold myself accountable and to evaluate the process of the action research while facilitating these skills in a different way with the youth.

## **1.5 Literature Overview**

### **1.5.1 Introduction**

In this review I offer an overview of the relevant literature in terms of the research, including necessary definitions of the pertinent terminology. Each subsequent chapter and the articles that are part of those, incorporate a review of the literature in relation to the focus of the specific article. I have attempted not to repeat information, although this has been required to the extent that it is necessary in this chapter to give a clear context for the research across each phase.

### **1.5.2 What is critical reflexivity?**

Despite a lack of agreement on terminology and definitions, ‘reflective’ or ‘reflexive’ practices are still considered “essential in developing knowledge for practice and professional life” (Graham, 2017, p. 3). Recent findings indicate that these terms are often conflated and used inter-changeably or inconsistently, and in various ways across various disciplines, leading to a lack of conceptual clarity especially regarding the term ‘reflexivity’ which has been defined and understood in multiple ways (Gilbert & Sliap, 2009; Fook, White & Gardner 2006; Landy et al., 2016; Morley, 2015). The varied and sometimes contentious nature of reflexivity presents a challenge to researchers and educators who are interested in using it (Faulkner, et al., 2016), and a number of researchers have explored the definitions and conceptual understandings of these terms, including reflection and critical reflection (Gilbert & Sliap, 2009; Graham, 2017; Landy et al., 2016; Morley, 2015, White et al., 2006). White et al. (2006) do an extensive review of the literature and the development of the relevant concepts and conclude that because of the increased interest in the field across disciplines, it is full of diverse understandings that are complex and difficult to track. I will not attempt to do this here, but offer instead a definition of reflexivity as I have understood and applied the term throughout this research. I then delve deeper to consider the term “critical reflexivity” and the connotations this has for research and practice.

As Morley (2015) states: “The concepts of reflection, critical reflection, reflexivity, and critical reflexivity are presented, interpreted, and used differently, depending on the context and position of the author, and thus remain relatively elusive concepts, resisting universal definition” (p. 285). For this reason it becomes imperative to clearly define these terms for the purpose of the particular research you are undertaking and for the context in which you are using the terms. For the purpose of this research I have throughout the study followed a broad definition of reflexivity by Gilbert and Sliap (2009) who describe it as an ongoing critical appraisal of self and others in action; understanding how our actions are formed by our context and our relationships to others. In relation to self-reflexivity this involves understanding how we position ourselves and how our positioning is affected by dominant discourses. To put this another way: “Reflexivity involves the ability to understand how one’s social locations and experiences of advantage or disadvantage have shaped the way one understands the world” (Landy et al., 2017). In acknowledging reflexivity as an inter-relational process it is viewed as occurring in context, as dynamic and iterative, influenced by our past and present social interaction with others and how we position ourselves in relationship (Gilbert & Sliap, 2009). The dynamic nature of reflexivity as viewed here moves us beyond ‘reflection’ – not just an understanding or awareness of how we position ourselves within our social context, but going further to ensure that our responses to others and our actions in a social context are in line with our beliefs and ethical position (Door, 2014).

Cunliffe (2008) also supports reflexivity as a ‘moral’ activity explaining that as we come to understand that we create meaning and a sense of self interactively with others, we then begin to examine our intentions so that we can act more ethically towards others in our social context. Gergen (1999) explains this as an ability to move beyond your own philosophical positioning to become open to, and embrace, multiple viewpoints. More simply put, reflexivity is understood as being more than reflection because it leads to action and it is more than just internal dialogue and self-appraisal that is required (Feucht et al., 2017). Feucht et al. (2017) have recently highlighted the need for ‘epistemic reflexivity’ as a tool for meaningful change in teacher education using the 3R-EC Framework (reflection-reflexivity-resolved action in epistemic cognition). The notion that it is important to understand your own beliefs about the nature and process of knowledge, to become open to changing your personal epistemologies, and put this into action as set out in this framework, is useful as this core understanding seems to be at the heart of *becoming* and being a reflexive practitioner.

In taking a relational view of reflexivity generally, it is important to follow a social constructionist approach in terms of which “knowledge (as it is represented in language) is part of the coordinated activities of individuals, which are used to accomplish locally-agreed-upon purposes concerning the real and the good” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 76). The authors explain that in this orientation, the focus is not on independence but rather on inter-dependence. This is supportive of a reflexivity that is more than just personally beneficial but is collaborative and strives towards positive social outcomes. Although there are a number of different theoretical and epistemological approaches to reflexivity (Fook et al., 2006), this research falls within a postmodern social constructionist approach, taking in account critical theory and relational and dialogical approaches as will be further detailed in Chapter 2.

‘Critical reflexivity’ and ‘critical reflection’ are also terms that are often conflated and used inconsistently, but are both informed by social constructivism (Morley, 2015). The principal difference outlined by Morley (2015) is that “critical reflexivity enables a practitioner to undertake critically reflective practice” which involves activating transformative processes (p. 284). In practical terms Cunliffe (2004) describes critically reflexive practice in relation to good management as involving a critical examination of what good practice is, the assumptions that underlie our actions, and the impact of our actions. She focuses on three issues to explain how critical reflexivity involves *different ways of thinking* about reality and learning so that being critically reflexive is more than the application of a tool but is rather a philosophical practice that involves us being accountable for our actions and how we construct our social reality on a number of levels:

Existential: Who am I and what kind of person do I want to be?

Relational: How do I relate to others and the world around me?

Praxis: The need for self-conscious and ethical action based on a critical questioning of past actions and of future possibilities (p. 408)

Stein (2006) uses the term ‘critical reflection’ to define a similar process in terms of which “adults identify the assumptions governing their actions, locate the historical and cultural origins of the assumptions, question the meaning of the assumptions, and develop alternative ways of acting” (cited in White et al., 2006, p. 12). Fook & Askeland (2007) also indicate a broader characterisation of critical reflection as not just a deeper understanding of taken-for-granted assumptions and personal experiences, but an understanding of these experiences within a wider social context and for the purpose of improving practice. Critical reflexivity is more than just changing the way you think for your own advantage; it involves a way of being that moves you towards social thinking and action. “Ultimately, through critical reflection on deep assumptions, especially about the social world and the individual person’s connection with it, a person should be able to become more empowered in acting within and upon her or his social world” (Fook & Askeland, 2007, p. 3).

Taylor et al. (2008) break down learning reflective practice into three key stages: “(1) understanding the social construction of reality, (2) recognising one’s own contribution to that construction, and (3) taking action to reshape that construction” (p. 658). In a similar vein, and drawing on a number of definitions, Fook et al. (2006) sum up critically reflective practice as involving:

- (i) a process (cognitive, emotional, experiential) of examining assumptions (of many different types and levels) embedded in actions for experience;
- (ii) a linking of these assumptions with many different origins (personal, emotional, social, cultural, historical, political):
- (iii) a review and re-evaluation of these according to relevant (depending on context, purpose, etc.) criteria;
- (iv) a reworking of concepts and practice based on this evaluation (p. 12)

The above shows the dynamic and complex nature of critical reflexivity well, as it operates as an iterative process on a number of different levels, involving social interaction in and across a variety of contexts and disciplines. This is aligned with the definition of reflexivity used in this research and described as an ongoing critical appraisal of self and others in action (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). This continuous process of critical appraisal is further viewed in light of a Critical Reflexive Model which is detailed in Chapter 2 and serves as a conceptual framework for this research and as a basis for critically examining and re-examining our taken-for-granted assumptions in such a way that they become open to ‘reworking’ our beliefs and practices. I have used the terms ‘reflexivity’ and ‘critical reflexivity’ in this research as expressed above and with the intention that they convey more than



‘reflective’ cognitive skills but are embodied with purpose and action. In quoting or paraphrasing other researchers and authors I use the terms chosen by them to represent their own understandings of the terminology.

Pillow (2010) differentiates reflexivity as a method in social science research and as a form of practice or use in interventions. In this thesis I consider both as I investigate the need for researcher reflexivity as integral to the approach used here, and also reflexivity in practice, as a tool or skill, for engaging students in tertiary education towards building critical reflexivity and in community practice as a way of facilitating agency and voice. At times these converge and result in shifting usages of terminology but overall consideration is given to the importance of reflexivity at various levels: self; self as researcher; in terms of research methodology; in pursuing reflexive practice; and in developing reflexive skills in and with participants to the research.

### **1.5.3 Why Critical Reflexivity?**

It is argued that reflexivity is crucial for the development of a critical consciousness of our own and others’ intentions and assumptions, for revealing power dynamics, and for moving towards a position of enabling agency and action (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). Having reflexive skills or *being* reflexive then impacts not just ourselves but also how we interact in the community. Fook et al. (2006) argue that a reflexive awareness of the self in action is essential for appreciating the role we play in constructing our world. The authors then view reflexivity as an empowering process that helps us understand how we can live better communally.

In the broad sense expressed above, reflective practice can be used in a number of ways to improve practice which makes it important to clearly outline the purpose of the process in the particular context (Fook et al., 2006). Not only is reflexivity considered an important strategy for qualitative research (Berger, 2013), but having a capacity for reflexivity is considered essential across a number of disciplines and in education, affecting both the personal and the professional. For example, it is considered especially vital for health professionals, both clinicians and students, as it can improve service and affect patient outcomes (Landy et al., 2016). The benefits and application of critical reflexivity across a number of contexts relevant to this research are explored in more detail below.

#### **1.5.3.1 Researcher reflexivity**

Reflexivity is seen as a major strategy for ensuring quality in qualitative research as a way of taking into account and understanding how the experiences, characteristics, personality and beliefs of the researcher impact the outcomes of the research (Berger, 2013). In terms of research, Berger (2013), citing a number of researchers, views reflexivity as “the process of a continual internal dialogue and

critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (p. 2). In this sense reflexivity in research is seen as an ongoing process of critical reflection both on the knowledge produced and how it was produced (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Faulkner et al. (2016) describe this simply: "reflexivity means being aware of and acknowledging the researcher's contribution to the construction of knowledge" (p. 198). This is important to enhance the credibility of research findings and the rigour or trustworthiness of the study (Faulkner et al., 2016). Reflexivity in research is also important in embracing the subjectivity of the researcher and acknowledging that, "[t]here is no means of achieving an 'observer free' picture of nature" no matter what measures are put in place to try and achieve this (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 76). This is viewed as important in recognising the influence of Western research practices in other cultural contexts (Gergen & Gergen, 1991), and is of particular relevance in a SA context in light of our colonial history.

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) also view reflexivity as having an ethical purpose, which means that the entire research process, including the aims of the research, the researcher him or herself, the research context, the participants and the methods, are critically scrutinised throughout. Hibbert et al. (2014) also extend the idea of researcher reflexivity by calling for a relationally reflexive practice in which they suggest that "researchers attend to critically questioning the multiple and possible connections with their surroundings: their limits and prejudices, their possible relationships to the situation they are in (their discipline, culture, and historical context) as well as the constitutive role of researcher-participant relationships" (p. 10). Because research cannot be considered free from the influence of the researcher's positionality, a number of strategies have been developed to take this into account. For example: a clear acknowledgement of the impact of the researcher and continuous appraisal of his or her position throughout the process; being reflective about both commonalities and differences between the researcher and participants; using a log to document data and reflect on and how it relates to the researcher; repeated reviews of the data; peer consultation; and ensuring participants play a key role in the research process and evaluation (Berger, 2013). Watt (2007) highlights the value of using a reflective journal throughout her research process, which helped her on a number of levels to stay reflexive, make links between theory and practice, and to develop insights into the inquiry and her position as a qualitative researcher. In this research, I use my own life story work to reflect closely on my positionality and a number of other strategies depending on the phase of the research including dialoguing closely with my academic supervisor, and providing opportunities for an open, participatory and dialogical process with participants in the education and community phases.

### **1.5.3.2 Self- reflexivity**

“[A] self-conscious person is at the center of understanding and learning” (Cunliffe, 2004, p. 410). In this sense it is important to start with our selves, and if we are able to think more critically about ourselves, we become more open to seeing multiple constructions of reality and to see that how we practice and act in the world is a relational activity (Cunliffe, 2004). Eriksen (2009), in discussing a practical reflexivity and self-authorship assignment for students, describes the importance of developing authentic leadership by first identifying one’s values and beliefs to develop a clear sense of the self. Using practical reflexivity to better understand the self and how one relates to others and acts in the world, leads to self-awareness, and in turn, to self-authorship. The author argues that reflexivity skills are essential here for students to “continuously develop the basis on which to be authentic leaders” as our beliefs, values and principles are “not hardwired in us” and often change as we mature and in different contexts (p. 3). This implies, rightly, that self-study or a state of self-awareness is not a once off project, but that skills are needed to continuously enable one to re-visit and engage with the “self” and to challenge our values and beliefs. “The self should be seen as a work in progress that must continuously be reauthored as one grows and develops” (Eriksen, 2009, p. 5).

Nagata (2004), in relation to intercultural communication education, describes self-reflexivity as “having an ongoing conversation with one’s whole self about what one is experiencing as one is experiencing it,” and as an “advanced form of self-knowledge” (p. 141). The author views this as an ability that can improve relationships, intercultural sensitivity and communication, with self-reflexivity going further than self-reflection to enable action in the moment, linking theory to practice (Nagata, 2004). In this sense, self-reflexivity is not just about the self, it is an understanding of the self in relation to others; and developing self-reflexivity is not a selfish exercise designed just for self-benefit but rather to engage people in more socially responsible action.

### **1.5.3.3 Critical reflexivity in education and professional practice**

Research indicates that transformation in education is considered as more than just adding to learners’ skills and knowledge base, and in a SA context this has become increasingly important to address past inequalities and injustices resulting from apartheid. Among the related purposes of higher education in SA the ‘Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education’ (1997) is the importance of contributing to and supporting societal transformation. The paper states specifically that one of the purposes of higher education is:

To contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens. Higher education encourages the development of a reflective capacity and

willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies and practices based on a commitment to the common good (Chapter 1: 1.3)

The goals of responsible citizenship are also important globally. Gergen (2009) stresses the importance of viewing education not as a process of individual success or failure but believes its overall aim should be to increase individual and group potentials for participating in local and global relational processes. Effective education then needs to consider the productive participation of individuals in family, community and other social and political structures, and thereby foster “processes that indefinitely extend the potentials of relationship” (p. 243). It needs to involve a change in the way knowledge and skills are acquired, going beyond obtaining foundational knowledge or subject content, and allowing for the application of knowledge in real world contexts (Waghid, 2002). Mangadu (2014) stresses that “[r]aising critical consciousness involves a significant learning experience with a real world context” (p. 11). Critical thinking and consciousness, through reflexive learning are therefore the cornerstones for becoming independent and active learners (Mangadu, 2014).

Cunliffe (2004) links Freire’s critical pedagogy with social constructionist notions to show the importance of helping students to understand the subjective and socially constructed nature of their experiences so that they can better understand how their own actions impact on creating knowledge, identities and their realities. Following such a reflexive process in education is believed to open up possibilities for transformative learning (TL) that aids learners to challenge their own views and beliefs. Kroth and Cranton (2014) view TL as involving a ‘deep shift in perspective’ so that learners become more open, critical and discriminating in their views. The process of testing our assumptions to bring a change in our frames of reference are aligned with Mezirow’s ideas of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997; Mezirow, 2009); and critical reflexivity is considered as an important part of the TL process. Teaching reflective practice is also considered an important goal in education as introducing a way to enhance students’ “personal and professional effectiveness by having greater self-knowledge along with a broader repertoire of cognitive frames, emotional reactions, and behaviours on which to draw” (Taylor et al., 2008, p.657). These ideas and connections are explored specifically in the second phase of the research relating to the development of critical reflexivity in education.

#### **1.5.3.4 Critical reflexivity in community practice**

Reed et al. (2012) are of the view that despite numerous calls for and recognition of the importance of reflexivity in community psychology, it is seldom evident in practice. This is despite the real need, as stressed by the authors, for reflexivity in community research particularly involving diverse

communities or participants where exposing biases and prejudices may be uncomfortable. Cosgrove & McHugh (2000) also highlight that in both feminist approaches and community psychology there is the “recognition that reflexivity *should* be an integral part of the research process,” (own emphasis) (p.828). As above, the authors here also note the apparent lack in community psychology of incorporating reflexivity fully into practice. Regardless of the methods used in a community approach, there is a call for reflection on taken-for-granted assumptions, a need to identify and reveal our personal and professional positioning as researchers, and ensuring that we do not speak for others (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000).

Participatory action research (PAR) is used in a range of community-based research where participants are involved in the research as ‘active agents’ in transforming their own lives (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011, p. 493). Reflexivity is seen as central to PAR as researchers and participants engage together in a cycle that Baum (2016) describes as involving “reflection, planning, acting, further observing and reflection, then new plans and action” (p. 405). Issues of power are also seen as central to conducting PAR as a truly participatory method, especially in relation to decolonised research practice that values local knowledge, but is not always apparent in interventions (Baum, 2016). In this sense, reflexivity is important both as part of the process of PAR and for those conducting the research.

The idea of developing reflexivity and creating reflexive spaces within community work is explored by Sliep and Gilbert (2007) in more detail through a case study in Burundi. The authors focus particularly on the relevance of reflexive approaches in addressing power structures and supporting spaces aimed at social cohesion and strengthening the collective after periods of escalated violence, conflict, and trauma. They stress both the importance of reflexivity for themselves as researchers and well as with participants, especially as reflexivity is often not present within communities experiencing such great stress. The authors found that “by consciously creating a space for purposeful inter-relational reflection, an opportunity was created to give individual and collective meaning to experiences, and thereby, create the possibility of interacting differently with others in everyday life” (p.301). Narrative theatre has also been used as a tool in community-based work with refugees in Uganda as a method to enable reflexivity among participants as it deals with issues of power, using drama to create spaces to explore the group’s intentions and effects in relation to problems. Building reflexivity was considered important both for the psychosocial workers and participants involved in the study (Sliep, Weingarten, & Gilbert, 2004). Gilbert and Sliep (2009) argue that reflexivity is an important component in social action, shifting from self-appraisal to “a critical appraisal of self as a responsible member of collective action,” to examine social assumptions and the effects (intended or unintended) of these (p. 470). The authors argue that such an appraisal and ‘inter-relational reflexivity’ is necessary for not just revealing power dynamics but going further

to engage in “the building of relationships of trust in which accountability, responsibility and moral agency come into play,” (p. 478). This is important both for the individuals concerned and the stakeholders involved in community work.

#### **1.5.4 Life stories**

Stories, in narrative theory, are important because of the social role that they play – including constructing identities, acting as sense-making tools, and encouraging ourselves and others to act (Riesmann, 2008). In this research, sharing stories about our lives is considered a way into becoming more reflexive and aware of ourselves and others in context and is explored at a number of levels as detailed below.

##### **1.5.4.1 Making sense of our lives and our identity**

“[P]eople by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The narratives we tell can be viewed as a cognitive process that organises and gives meaning to events; and in stories about the self, gives meaning to our lives (Polkinghorne, 1991). Polkinghorne (1991) views the stories we tell about our lives as a basis for self-understanding and personal identity. This view is supported by McAdams (2001) who views identity as an internalised life story, the story one tells about themselves that reflects their cultural norms of values. He describes life stories as “psychosocial constructions, co-authored by the person himself or herself and the cultural context within which that person’s life is embedded and given meaning” (McAdams, 2001, p. 101). McAdams (2001) views identity as “an integrative configuration of self-in-the-adult-world,” both by synchronic (in content) and diachronic (in time) means (p. 102). This understanding stems from Erikson’s 1963 theory of psychosocial development, specifically stage five, which focuses on identity versus role confusion and the psychosocial desire to be ‘one thing’ (McAdams, 2001).

McAdams (2001) argues that people then begin to make sense of their lives by developing integrated stories of the self that are culturally meaningful and provide them with purpose. He also points out that as we choose which events are important to define us, identity itself becomes, to a certain extent, about choice and, depending on how we structure our narratives, can impact mental health. “People create unity and purpose in their lives, and they make sense of the psychosocial niches they inhabit in adulthood through stories, even if they must rely on more than one story to do so” (McAdams, 2001, p. 117). In this sense we create a ‘narrative identity’ through the stories we integrate about ourselves (McAdams, 2008, p. 242). Polkinghorne (1991) describes our identity as “the drama we are unfolding” in our self narrative, emphasising the constructive and storied nature of the self (p. 149). In this sense, our identity is not static, and further, there are times when we are not able to integrate our experiences or *hold the plot together*, leading to despair or disconnectedness. The resulting

feeling of incoherence requires a “new” plot for the reintegration of the self (Polkinghorne, 1991). Identity development is therefore viewed as a way of negotiating the complexities of society and coming to understand who we are within our social contexts. It is not an individual endeavour but, embedded within social context and culture, the individual and social world are viewed as “co-authors” of identity (McAdams, 2001, p. 116).

#### **1.5.4.2 Stories in context**

Just as McAdams (2001) considers both the storyteller and his or her cultural context as co-authors in self-narratives, Bruner (2004) points out that “life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about ‘possible lives’ that are part of one’s culture” (p. 694). He emphasises the susceptibility of our life stories not only to cultural influences but also to interpersonal and linguistic influences. In shaping our stories, these influences also shape our perceptual experiences. Bruner (2004) therefore stresses the importance of considering how our autobiographies develop, how the way we talk about ourselves changes, and how our stories can ‘control’ the way we think about our lives.

“It is painfully clear that life stories echo gender and class constructions in society and reflect, in one way or another, prevailing patterns of hegemony in the economic, political, and cultural contexts wherein human lives are situated.” (McAdams, 2001, p. 114). In terms of post modernism, power is varied and comes in many different forms, so as Graham (2017) points out, “[b]odies are ascribed with perceived power based on ethnicity, race, age, gender, disability and sexual orientation,” which influences relationships, experiences, and social institutions (p. 39). Because stories reflect the norms, values and power differences of our societies, it becomes important to expose these “constitutive meanings” and give voice to narratives of suppression and marginalised groups (McAdams, 2001, p. 118).

Although I follow a broad narrative approach in this research and am not focused on the therapeutic outcomes of sharing stories in terms of narrative therapy, it is useful to consider the approach taken in therapy, as personal stories are used in a similar way to better understand ourselves in our stories in developing reflexivity. In narrative therapy there is a focus on a client’s personal story and the way the story expresses the client’s problem. In viewing the narrative as the problem, there is an attempt to remove self-blame from the client and to “construct alternative interpretations of their life circumstances and assist them in becoming aware of the social/cultural forces impinging upon them” (Gergen & Gergen, 2006, p. 113). As stories are understood to shape our lives in powerful ways, it is necessary to explore our life stories, the meanings we give to them, their effects, and the context in which they arose (Morgan, 2000). Therapists then work together with clients to build ‘new’ or alternative preferred narratives based on existing experiences but reducing the influence of the

problem, which is seen as ‘external’ to the person, and so offer new possibilities of living differently (Morgan, 2000). The PP module does not have therapeutic intentions and the broad aim is to develop critical reflexivity, however participants on the course may experience healing effects by sharing and deconstructing their stories in a group as story tellers and witnesses. Gergen and Gergen (2006) outline the possible reasons for the efficacy of narratives in a number of practices as involving: receptivity (often associated with pleasure), familiarity (a common vehicle of communication), witness trust (storyteller as witness to a ‘truth’), empathic witnessing (audiences engage in emphatic listening), and recreating the self (through the storyteller’s story) (p. 118). More generally, stories are believed to “inform human life,” in the sense that they “give form – temporal and spatial orientation, coherence, meaning, intention, and especially boundaries – to lives that inherently lack form” (Frank, 2010, p. 2).

#### **1.5.4.3 From storytelling towards empowerment and agency**

Life-narratives are believed to be an important vehicle for the realisation of agency in one’s life in terms of an ecological view of agency as something that is not merely possessed but achieved “through the active engagement of individuals with aspects of their contexts-for-action” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Empowerment has been viewed as a “process of change” whereby people who have been “denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). However, the ability to make choices, is not as simple as implied when considerations of power are taken into account. Kabeer (1999) understands choice in this sense in terms of three inter-related dimensions: resources (pre-conditions, not just material but also social), agency (process) and achievements (outcomes) (p. 437). She further describes agency as the “ability to define one’s goals and act upon them” but says that this includes more than “observable” action but “encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense* of agency” (p. 438).

Kabeer (1999) also extends the forms that agency can take beyond just decision-making (which is the usual conceptualisation) to include forms ranging from negotiation to manipulation and the ability to analyse and reflect. It is this dimension of empowerment and broad view of agency with an underlying purpose that requires a process that links decision-making and choices to lived experience. Denborough (2014) emphasises that it is not the “facts” of our lives that we can change, but their “meanings” and our perceptions of ourselves, “[a]nd if the story we tell about ourselves changes, it will influence what becomes possible for us in the future” (p. 21).

The multidimensional nature of agency is also explored by Samman and Santos (2009) who look at the various indicators of agency and empowerment in terms of Rowlands’ 1997 empowerment framework: *power over* (resisting manipulation), *power to* (creating new possibilities), *power with*



(acting in a group), and *power from within* (enhancing self-respect and self-acceptance). Of important consideration in working with life stories is an intertwining of these different dimensions to facilitate a capability of working from a strength-based perspective. Through storytelling it is important to identify the strengths, skills and steps people are taking in various aspects of their everyday lives or have taken in the past to develop new perspectives on their identities and meaning in their lives (Denborough, 2014).

Agency, as described by Bandura (2001) is seen as enabling people to play a part in their adaption, self-development and self-renewal. “To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions” (Bandura, 2001, p.2). The core features he identifies are intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. Overall, what is of importance in a practical sense is that actions rooted in agency are potentially more sustainable as they are well-grounded. “Goals, rooted in a value system and sense of personal identity, invest activities with meaning and purpose” (Bandura, 2001, p.8). Bandura (2001) also stresses the importance of efficacy beliefs, a sense of control, as a foundation to personal agency and a major influence on personal development and choice behaviour. It is these features that are intertwined with the storytelling – coherence, sense of control and meaning. As agency among individuals and groups may build on different strengths or an interaction of different strengths, it is considered important to look towards a wider, more encompassing definition of agency when measuring outcomes in relation to the value of storytelling. In exploring these transformative effects and a widely defined “positive” agency that encompasses particularly the importance placed on self-efficacy and self-belief by Bandura (2001), it is relevant to consider this in terms of positive psychological capital. Psychological capital had been defined as a person’s “positive psychological state of development” and includes considerations of confidence (self-efficacy); optimism, hope and resilience (Luthan, Avolio, Avey & Norman, 2007, p. 542). A mix of these factors can lead to a better sense of self, which augments agency.

#### **1.5.4.4 Collective storytelling: From social support to social change**

Life stories do not happen and are not told in a vacuum. This is important in a number of respects. First, personal stories about our lives are not necessarily self-centred and can and do extend to other people and communities, with the importance of events not only being determined by personal effects but also on the impact of others (Polkinghorne, 1991). Second, when life stories are told within a group or ‘witnessing community’ through dialogue and experience, meaning is created that adds to the common body of knowledge of the group (Sliep, 2010). Third, listening to different stories is essential for the functioning of democracy in a society where there is respect for others and a need to recognise and embrace difference (Plummer, 1995, cited in Graham, 2017, p. 65). Fourth, stories can bring about processes for social change and justice, especially when stories from marginalised groups

are heard (Graham, 2017). However, as Graham (2017) warns campaigns that stimulate public support can have both positive and negative impacts depending on the stories that are put forward.

Further, the experience of life story work that is done in groups is focused not just on the individual growth but also on the collective support that results from not just telling your own story but also from the witnessing of the stories of others. Social support is believed to play a valuable role in psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985); as a protection against the negative health consequences of life stress (Cobb, 1976); and positively towards healing (Graham, Powell & Karam, 2011). It has been defined in various ways but broadly involves “the emotional and physical comfort given by friends, family and others” (Graham et al., 2011, p. 7). More specifically it has also been defined as “information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed and a member of a network of mutual obligations” (Cobb, 1976). Various features of social support have also been explored including: communication, uncertainty reduction, enhanced control, networks, various forms of help, coping, interaction, esteem, belonging, competence and exchange (Mattson & Hall, 2011). The beneficial effects of social support can occur through different processes, including the “buffering” or protective effect of social support and an overall positive effect that is experienced because of stable and socially rewarded roles (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Further, a lack of social support may also result in the opposite effect and result in depression or anxiety (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Support groups are seen as a way of giving and receiving social support and have been defined as groups of “individuals who share a common life stressor and come together to provide mutual support and information” with various benefits including increased sense of belonging and self-esteem, reducing isolation and validation (Mattson & Hall, 2011, p. 204). Being part of a group in the story telling process, with the possibility of forming continuing relationships and support groups, is explored as an integral part of the experience. That involvement in groups can have positive consequences has long been asserted and is now recaptured by social capital theory, and is specifically relevant in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualisation that focuses on the benefits that individuals gain by participating in groups and purposefully constructing social networks as a resource (Portes, 1998). Social capital has various definitions but can be viewed in terms of connectedness and the quality and number of social relationships within specific groups or populations (Harpham, Grant & Thomas, 2002). There are various ways to consider social capital, both structurally and cognitively. However, of relevance here is a focus on the cognitive part of social capital that takes into consideration trust, reciprocity, sharing and support (Harpham et al, 2002), and how these factors can positively (and in some cases negatively) impact on a person’s personal and social development through sharing stories in a group context.

### **1.5.5 Connecting Stories and Reflexivity**

There are a number of ways to develop reflexivity as noted above in 1.3; but of relevance here is that critical reflexivity is made possible through working with individual and group personal experiences, life stories and dialogue. As such, stories can be viewed as tools that enable individuals to reflect and therefore to better understand themselves on both a personal and social level (Suarez-Ortega, 2013). There are various ways of considering how we make sense of ourselves and our lives, but a narrative approach is “based on the assumption that we make sense of our experience through narratives, stories or drama” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011, p. 66). It is through the telling of personal life stories that we are working with lived experience. Graham (2017) describes this well in saying that focusing on ‘lived experience’ draws attention “to how we interpret what happens in our lives as we make sense of our feelings, perceptions and actions” (p. 56). Working with personal stories, for example in an educational setting, means that we are bringing lived experience into the picture so that the complexities of our society can be explored in context (Sliep & Kotze, 2007). In this way personal discourses of learners are linked to their professional lives (Sliep & Kotze, 2007). Life stories are used to enable learners to learn through their own experiences, which connect new knowledge to their contexts, and through this to increase their understandings of the learning process, which then works as a guide for future learning (Sliep, 2010).

In regard to authentic leadership, Eriksen (2009) asserts that rather than presenting theory in the usual way, using self-narratives about personal beliefs, helped facilitate “the transformation of student relationships from ones based on the categorisation of others to ones based on students’ shared humanity” (p. 16). The range of learning was extended, using students’ lives and their subjective experiences to bring about a more meaningful and enduring experience (Eriksen, 2009). Cunliffe and Coupland (2011) take this further by considering ‘embodiment’ as a part of narrative sense making in our lived experience. They describe embodiment as “bodily sensations, felt experiences, emotions and sensory knowing” that are part of daily experiences and interactions (p. 64). In terms of embodied narrative sense making, appraisal is more than cognitive, and involves sensory knowing that is plotted across time in such a way that narrative coherence encompasses drawing on past, present, and anticipated future experiences and interactions. Although Cunliffe and Coupland (2011) apply their findings in a sports and organisational context, embodiment can be viewed as central to developing reflexivity through life story work.

Not only does sharing personal stories impact the individual, collective understandings are also enabled through the ongoing deconstruction and construction of group narratives that promote critical thinking and reflexive understandings (Sliep & Kotze, 2007). The links between reflexivity and life story methodology are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Narrative reflexivity: Linking biography to inter-relational reflexivity**

	<b>REFLEXIVITY</b>	<b>LIFE STORY AS A METHOD TO DEVELOP REFLEXIVITY</b>
<b>PROCESS</b>	Understanding how meaning is shaped and actions formed by and from the world	Sharing stories: Telling, re-telling and deconstruction of life stories + respectful witnessing of the stories of others
<b>CONTEXTUAL</b>	Tied to context, continually constructed through interaction – others, space, time	Life stories span the concept of space and time over generations and help people to understand the role of context
<b>RELATIONAL</b>	Formed from social interactions with others	Exploration of past and current social interaction with others
<b>DYNAMIC PROCESS</b>	Iterative and dynamic – action changes context, context changes action – intentions and assumptions change	Deconstruction of stories is a dynamic process of understanding self in the world – being mindful of when, where, with whom action takes place. Stories change over time and with different audiences.
<b>SHIFT IN CONSCIOUSNESS</b>	Making space to listen to alternative framings of reality and multiple standpoints	Increasing critical consciousness and collective understanding through examining past activities with others in socio-historical context

Adapted from Gilbert & Sliep (2009); Sliep (2010); Sliep & Kotze (2007)

## **1.6 Conclusion: Structure of Thesis**

In light of the available literature, I consider critical reflexivity as an essential skill and process that can be harnessed using a narrative and experience-based approach to bring context into the learning or community space. Being critically reflexive and better understanding your context, means you are better placed to understand yourself, others, and society. Deeper understanding in this way, in turn, enables the possibility for better and more socially aware responses to current and future action. This research is aimed at a deeper understanding of how and why life story work develops critical reflexivity and to explore the impact of this in a SA context in terms of my own positioning as a researcher, in tertiary education at a SA university, and in local community practice.

In Chapter 2, I set out the overall research design and theoretical framing for the research. I include details of the Critical Reflexive Model that was used as a basis for guiding the research and for developing critical reflexivity across the three contexts in the different phases of the research: self, education, and community practice. This chapter should be considered an overview of the design and theory used which is further detailed in the subsequent chapters in relation to each phase of the research.

Chapter 3 details the initial phase of the research involving my experience of life story work and reflexivity and includes an introduction and a published article:

Paper 1: Pathways of Reflection: Creating Voice Through Life Story and Dialogical Poetry  
Published as: Norton, L. (2017). Pathways of Reflection: Creating Voice Through Life Story and Dialogical Poetry. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 18(1). Art. 9.

The story of education is set out in Chapter 4 and includes three articles that are focused on developing reflexivity with tertiary education students, and provides additional detail on the methodology followed during the process.

Paper 2: A critical reflexive model: Working with life stories in Health Promotion Education  
Authors: Norton, L. & Sliep, Y.  
Accepted for publication: South African Journal of Higher Education (Vol 32 no.2 of 2018)

Paper 3: The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education  
Authors: Norton, L. & Sliep, Y.  
Accepted for publication: Qualitative Research in Psychology (Accepted: October, 2017)

Paper 4: Hindsight and Foresight for Better Insight  
Authors: Norton, L. & Sliep, Y.  
Submitted: Education as Change (Submitted: 8 December 2017)

Chapter 5 introduces the story of community practice with one article that details the participatory action research I undertook with a group of refugee youth.

Paper 5: #WE SPEAK: Exploring the experience of refugee youth through participatory research and poetry to facilitate voice  
Submitted: Journal of Youth Studies (Accepted subject to minor revision, 19 December, 2017)

The three preceding chapters are brought together in Chapter 6 with a discussion that connects the overall findings, including challenges, limitations and future recommendations. The chapter ends with concluding remarks and observations.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Research Design**

This is a qualitative research study and I have followed a reflexive process that is narrative, dialogical and participatory (*see* Figure 2). Qualitative methods fit well with the reflexive design I have adopted that incorporates biographical narratives (life stories) as they offer a way to describe the subjective content of experience of both the researcher and participants. As there are a number of phases to the research the methodology has been adapted to fit with the context of each phase. However, the intention throughout the research remains constant with the overriding emphasis being on listening to, hearing, and presenting the voices of the participants in acknowledgement that each person is the expert in their own lives (Morgan, 2000). In the first phase it is my voice that is brought to the fore so that I am better able to reflect on my positioning in the research, in the second it is the voices of the students from the various HP masters classes, and in the third it is the voices of the refugee youth. I acknowledge that my own subjectivity has not been silenced in these latter phases but in following a dialogical process, I have invited participants as much as possible to be a part of the research. In writing up the research, I offer my conclusions as just some of the multiple interpretations that can be given (Frank, 2010); and invite the readers to join in the dialogical process, to feel and listen to the words of the participants in their own ways, and to become part of this conversation.

#### **2.2 Theoretical Positioning**

This study is grounded in social constructionist principles in the belief that our reality, as we perceive it, is constructed through social action (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). This means that our beliefs about how we view the world are created through our interactions and dialogue with others (Cunliffe, 2008). Graham (2017) stresses the importance of postmodern theories for understanding our experiences in terms of our social worlds. She cites an important example of postmodern study as understanding the body in social, cultural and political contexts, in terms of the influence of power on experience and relationships, and perceptions of identity. Taking account of how we are situated in the social world means that: “Notions of a single identity are replaced with alternative emphasis on ‘identities’ reflecting individuals’ socially available choices which change and evolve according to situations and social contexts as a never-ending project through the life course” (Graham, 2017, p. 40). When life stories, histories and biographies are viewed in terms of a social constructionist perspective there is a recognition of the “communal basis of knowledge,” which enables one to be more reflexive and critical in challenging so-called truths privileged by dominant discourses (Slied & Kotze, 2007, p.

140). In constructionist terms, critical reflexivity means “the attempt to place one’s premises into question, to suspend the ‘obvious,’ to listen to alternative framings of reality, and to grapple with the comparative outcomes of multiple standpoints” (Gergen, 2008, p. 13).

For the specific purpose of this research I look towards a relational constructionist approach in terms of which ontology is viewed as a relational process and reflexivity is viewed as relational rather than an ‘individual act.’ (Hosking & Pluut, 2010). This approach enables a view of reflexivity as constructed as an "ongoing dialogue" that moves beyond reflexivity as a process of "minimizing bias", and "making bias visible" (p. 59). The authors note: “Our *different* starting point has been to centre an ontology of becoming in which the relational realities of self-other and relations (persons and worlds) are in ongoing construction in local-cultural, local-historical, language-based processes of inter-action” (p. 63).

Social constructionism and critical reflection as envisaged by Gergen (2008) and Hosking and Pluut (2010), above, is compatible with the narrative dialogical approach which is used in this research. ‘Suspending’ our taken for granted assumptions means that we recognise our strongly held beliefs as culturally and historically situated traditions rather than facts. On the same terms we can recognise the beliefs and traditions of others as equally legitimate, and this opens us to dialogue in such a way that we might find common ground.

Constructionism is not, then a candidate for the truth. Nor is it a belief system. Rather, the constructionist dialogues represent invitations to a way of understanding. As constructionist ideas enter our ways of talking, they may also transform our actions. The major question asked from a constructionist perspective is ‘what happens to our lives together’ when we construct the world in various ways? (Gergen, 2008, p. 29).

Exploring our lives is done through the telling of our life stories. For this reason my starting point is narrative theory within a constructionist paradigm that fits well with storytelling and understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative methodology is used both in the data collection and participatory intervention through the sharing of life stories and experiences by participants, and in the research analysis which is based on dialogical principles as well. Turning to narrative is considered useful in a reflexive study that is focused on people and stories, as it is through our stories that we discover our truths about our experiences, connect to others, and create meaning in our lives (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry is viewed “first and foremost as a way of understanding experience” (phenomenon) and as a research method for “narratively inquiring into experiences over time and context” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 542). Within a narrative view stories are understood within larger social and contextual narratives and there is an emphasis on the relational nature of the engagement between the researcher and the participant (Clandinin & Caine, 2008).



In applying a narrative theory approach and in asking participants to share their personal stories I have incorporated dialogical principles to encourage an egalitarian relationship between the research team and participants. A dialogical narrative approach and practice of interpretation is based on Mikhail Bakhtin's principle of 'non-finalizability' - that there is no one final meaning or authority, but that "every voice contains multiple other voices" (Frank, 2010, p. 16). Frank (2010), following a socio-narratology approach, argues that researchers have no claim to interpretative authority and need to take a dialogical attitude towards interpretation in terms of which participants are experts in their own lives. This fits well with Paulo Friere's (1970) notions of dialogue which he describes as "an existential necessity," as it is through our dialogical encounters that we name and transform the world. Dialogue, further "cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming – between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (p. 88). In Freire's (1970) view 'real' dialogue inspires trust and is built on love, faith, humility and hope. Further, dialogue, he says, both requires engagement in critical thinking and generates critical thought.

Bower (2005) describes both Bakhtin and Freire's views in relation to education as seeing "the movement of dialogue as a movement from technique to epistemological relationship. Teaching conveys ideas, but always with a view to an external object of knowledge...Process is key, and only through dialogue can ideas be conveyed, tested, rejected, accepted, revised, and made possible" (p.376). This allows for equal participation and reflection, openness to different perceptions and should be free from pressure or coercion (Bower, 2005). Rule (2009) draws on Bakhtin's and Freire's ideas of dialogue as open-ended and the principle of 'unfinalizability' to develop the notion of 'dialogic space' to "characterise educational projects with emancipatory potential" and to locate these ideas in an African context (p. 3). For both Bakhtin and Freire, Rule (2009) says "dialogue is central to what it means to be authentically human" (p. 7); and for both humans are "social beings" (p.11). As Frank (2010) argues for researchers to take a dialogical "attitude" towards interpretation, this then becomes a necessary approach for educators as well. In this research I attempt throughout to have such an attitude, to act in terms of the knowledge that participants are the experts of their own lives and to listen to their voices, always being open to possible multiple interpretations.

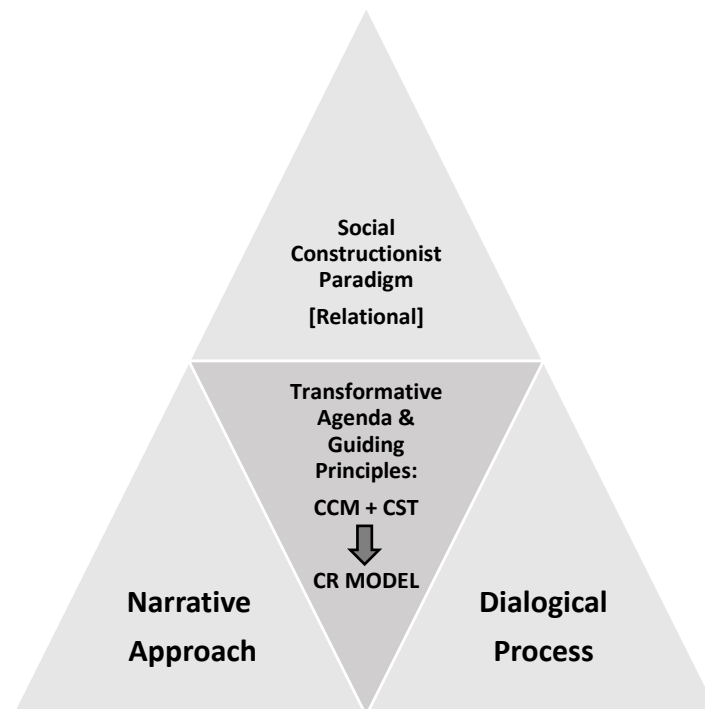
Using both narrative life story research and dialogical philosophies fits well with the principles of Critical Communicative Methodology (CCM) (Suarez-Ortega, 2013). CCM acknowledges the constructed nature of our interactions and stems from a belief that all people have the ability to analyse their realities and contribute to knowledge. In terms of CCM, "there is a recognition that scientific knowledge about the social world results from egalitarian dialogue among multiple and diverse voices" and is considered a methodological response to the 'dialogic turn' in societies (Gomez, Puigvert, & Fletcha, 2011, p. 236). There are a number of principles in CCM that are

expounded on by Gomez et al. (2011) that fit well with the aims of this research. First, the principle of 'cultural intelligence' is applied as part of CCM and is in line with Freire's theory of critical consciousness in terms of which 'ordinary' people have the ability to find meaning and make changes to their own situation. Cultural intelligence means that "every individual has communicative, practical, and academic abilities," which aims at breaking stereotypes about marginalised groups and those with little formal education having the capacity to contribute to research (p. 237). Second, CCM brings together 'systems' (the international academic community) and 'lifeworlds' (interpretations by people on daily experience) which, in turn, brings 'new knowledge' (p. 238). While the voices of participants are brought to the fore, the role of the researcher is not diminished but acts as a resource for academic knowledge that could be useful for participants to reinterpret their experiences. Thirdly, CCM is aimed at "building a social science of possibility" and the methodology is used to recognise both inherent inequalities in the participants' context and possibilities for transformation built on participants own knowledge (p. 241). In education, it is also important to consider more specifically Critical Social Theory (CST) which is considered as a "multidisciplinary framework with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge," and that advocates criticism and critical thinking for transformative educational outcomes (Leonardo, 2004, p. 11). Criticism is central to developing students' ability to question assumptions and to deconstruct current knowledge and then to reconstruct it for emancipatory purposes (Leonardo, 2004). This is also in keeping with Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed "which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed" (p. 48) and his call for "critical and liberating dialogue" (p. 65).

Having a dialogic attitude means that the door is opened for a transformative and social justice agenda. Increasingly throughout the research and especially when engaged in the community practice project, I reflected on outcomes and the 'usefulness' of the research. What happens afterwards? Is there any 'real' value for the participants after the research has been completed? These are questions I need to come back to and address in the final chapter but in discussing paradigms and belief systems that guide research, it is also important to consider outcomes. Although I did not begin the research specifically with a transformative agenda visibly in mind it was always in the background – to do research that was useful to the participants involved and not just for an academic accolade or audience (a hard bound thesis sitting *lonely* in a library). For ethical reasons it becomes important to reflect on this and to action it. The narrative and dialogical approach I have chosen fits well within a transformative paradigm described by Mertens (2010) as "a framework of belief systems that directly engages members of culturally diverse groups with a focus on social justice" (p. 470). As such, when we refer to social justice and human rights we are faced with ontological and epistemological difficulties in terms of a social constructionist framing - as Mertens (2010) asks: "Whose reality is privileged in this context?" (p. 470). Despite these complications, Mertens (2010) has used the transformative paradigm or the "spirit" of transformation in a number of projects as an ethical guide

for research that prioritises social justice, ensuring respect for cultural norms, and bringing participants into the research throughout the process. She concludes that the transformative paradigm is relevant in all cases where there is discrimination or oppression and in relation to power structures that propagate inequality. This is particularly apt in guiding research in a SA context which has been deeply divided by past apartheid injustices and inequality that continues into the present. In this sense, I believe that research in SA demands a transformative agenda as a guide to seeking and negotiating transformative outcomes and social justice. I am of the view that the contradictions that may unfold in following this type of approach can be alleviated or at the very least negotiated in terms of a narrative dialogical approach that takes all views into account and focuses on participatory and collaborative understandings. Following the ‘spirit’ of transformation is in keeping with a dialogical approach and what Gergen (2008) describes as being the most important aspect of what he terms the ‘constructionist message’: “the moment we begin to speak together, we have the potential to create new ways of being” (p. 29). The overall theoretical positioning is illustrated in Figure 2 below; demonstrating the theoretical framing for the conceptual model (Critical Reflexive Model or CR Model) which is an integral part of the research and is detailed below in 2.3.

**Figure 2: Theoretical positioning**



Key: **CCM**: Critical Communicative Methodology; **CST**: Critical Social Theory; **CR Model**: Critical Reflexive Model

### 2.3 Conceptual framework

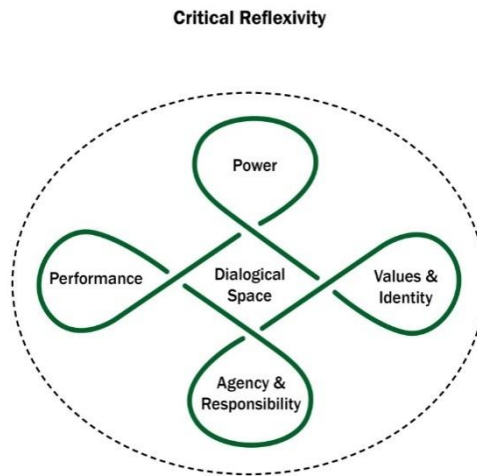
Because of the reflexive and phased nature of this research, I work with the theoretical underpinnings set out above at a number of levels, depending on the context of the research and the participants

involved. This is highlighted in each of the following chapters. Working reflexively and dialogically involves taking into account and adapting to the needs of the particular research participants and the particular contexts at particular times. This does not, however, mean that ‘anything goes’ and this research has been firmly grounded in theory by adopting a conceptual model that is used both as a foundation for developing methodology to guide narrative deconstruction (interrogating the layers within stories); practice and participatory methodology (teacher – learner; researcher – participant); and to critically analyse and evaluate the processes undertaken throughout the research. In conclusion, I also critically examine and evaluate the model itself for its efficacy as a tool for developing critical reflexivity.

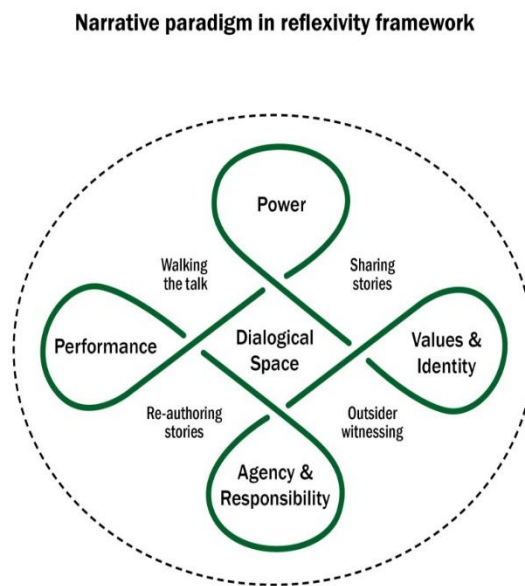
The Critical Reflexive Model (CR Model) was first conceptualised and developed by Sliep and Gilbert (2006) and has since been refined and evaluated in a number of studies (Gilbert and Sliep 2009; Sliep 2016; Sliep & Norton 2016), including as part of this research. The development and application of the CR Model in an educational setting is detailed in Chapter 4 (Paper 2: ‘A Critical reflexive model: Working with life stories in Health Promotion Education’). Its application in the other phases of the research is also mentioned in papers in Chapter 3 (Story of self) and Chapter 5 (Story of Practice). For this reason, only an overview of the CR model and the processes involved is given in this section. This means there is some overlap in information, but this is required to give an understanding of the overall processes followed in the research from the outset.

The CR Model opens up the possibility of examining the pathways that lead to critical reflexivity, involving both self-appraisal and an appraisal of self as a participant of collective action (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). This process of appraisal is aided when viewed as a dynamic, iterative, and continuous process that takes place within a safe dialogical space and focuses on four aspects: power, values informing identity, agency linked to responsibility, and performance (Sliep, 2014; Sliep & Norton, 2016) (*see* Figure 3, CR Model). Following a narrative biographical methodology using experiential storytelling and participatory dialogue within this framework deepens the exploration of pathways to critical reflexivity (*see* Figure 4, Narrative paradigm in reflexivity framework).

**Figure 3: Critical Reflexivity Model** (Sliep and Gilbert 2009; Sliep 2016; Sliep and Norton 2016)



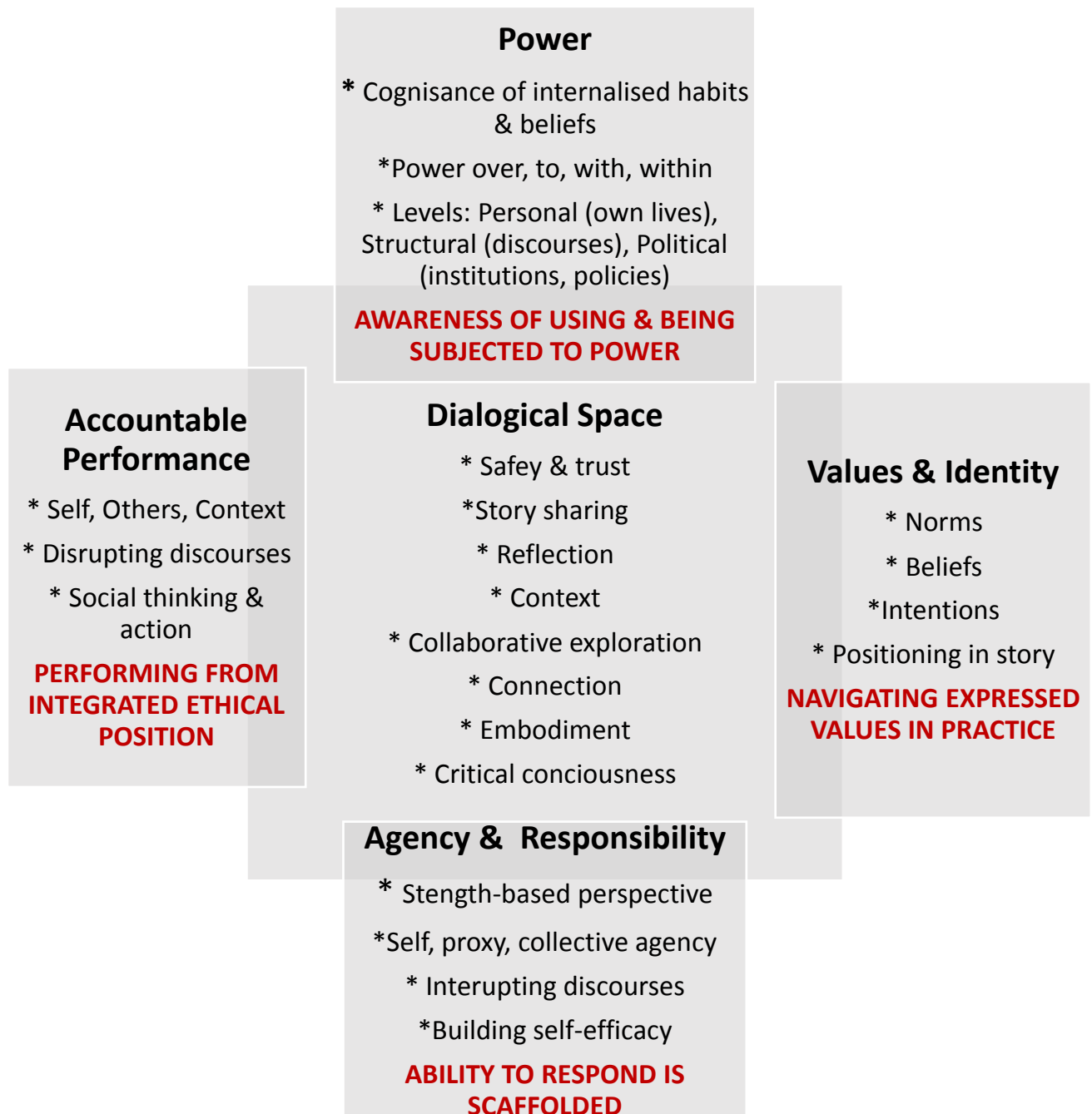
**Figure 4: Narrative paradigm in reflexivity framework** (Sliep 2016; Sliep and Norton 2016)



Moving through the ‘loops’ of the CR model involves exploring the mechanisms of power and deconstructing dominant discourses; an increased awareness of values and identity; interrogating responsibility and building agency; and moving to a position of social performativity. At the core of the reflexive process is a carefully facilitated dialogical space in which trust is built to enable the sharing and deconstruction of stories through dialogue and a number of carefully crafted experiential and analytical reflexive exercises. Each aspect of the model is explored throughout the research and practical examples of outcomes and participant experiences of the process are highlighted. For the purposes of this section these are summarised in Figure 5 to give an overview of the process, which is

discussed in detail in the coming chapters, and presented with examples from the participants involved.

**Figure 5: Overview of CR process in terms of CR Model**



The theoretical foundations for each loop have been carefully considered in the early stages of the development of the CR model, building on firm and long-standing theoretical approaches (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009; Sliep & Gilbert, 2007). Pertinent examples are highlighted in the table below (*see* Table 2).

**Table 2: Theoretical underpinnings supporting CR Model development**

<b>CR MODEL</b>	<b>THEORTICAL FOUNDATIONS</b>
<b>Dialogical Space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Gergen (1999): Relational reflexive practice (Gilbert &amp; Sliep, 2009; Sliep &amp; Gilbert, 2007)</li> <li>➤ Gergen (1985): Knowledge as co-constructed; communal basis of knowledge (Sliep, 2010; Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016)</li> <li>➤ Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogue and non-finalizability (cited in Norton &amp; Sliep, <i>see</i> Chapter 3)</li> <li>➤ Paulo Friere (1970) Dialogue (above)</li> <li>➤ Jerome Bruner: Engaging in collective activities (cited in Sliep &amp; Gilbert, 2007)</li> <li>➤ Bohm (1996): Representations of reality and dialogue (Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016)</li> <li>➤ Narrative theory: Shared meaning (Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>Deconstructing Power</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Derrida (1978): Deconstruction of power – de-centering, taking apart meaning to reveal how we come to understand things in a specific way; and deconstruction as transformation (cited in Gilbert &amp; Sliep, 2009; Sliep &amp; Gilbert, 2007)</li> <li>➤ Foucault (1980; 1982): Power viewed in a Foucauldian sense in that it shapes the way we see ourselves in the world (cited in Gilbert &amp; Sliep, 2009; Sliep, 2010; Sliep &amp; Gilbert, 2007; Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016).</li> <li>➤ Critical Social Theory (above)</li> <li>➤ Intersectionality (Sliep, 2010)</li> <li>➤ Narrative theory: Understanding dominant story (Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>Values &amp; Identity</b> (Previous: Determining moral agency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identity emerging in tertiary education practice (Sliep, 2010)</li> <li>➤ Gergen (1997): : Reflexivity as a relational process of social change, using Alisdair MacIntyres moral action as relations among persons (cited in Gilbert &amp; Sliep, 2009; Sliep &amp; Gilbert, 2007)</li> <li>➤ McAdams (2001): Identity as internalised life story (above)</li> <li>➤ Narrative theory: Using stories to understand ourselves and others; subjectivity and values (Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>Agency &amp; Responsibility</b> (Previous: Negotiating accountability and responsibility)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Paulo Freire (1970): Critical consciousness embedded in action (cited in Gilbert &amp; Sliep, 2009; Sliep &amp; Gilbert, 2007)</li> <li>➤ Bandura (2006): Social Cognitive Theory: Agency as interactive and emergent; individual, proxy and collective agency (cited in Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016)</li> <li>➤ Narrative theory: Stories of strength, agency and voice (Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>Accountable Performance</b> (Previous: Positive performativity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pratton (2008): Accountability linked to agency, personhood and power (cited in Gilbert &amp; Sliep, 2009)</li> <li>➤ Butler (1990;1999): Performativity as a verb, positive and negative performativity (cited in Gilbert &amp; Sliep, 2009; Sliep &amp; Gilbert, 2007)</li> <li>➤ Jackson (2004): How dominant discourses constitute subjects and performativity (cited in Gilbert &amp; Sliep, 2009; Sliep &amp; Gilbert, 2007)</li> <li>➤ Narrative theory: Developing and living preferred stories (Sliep &amp; Norton, 2016)</li> </ul>

In this research I am considering the CR Model in action as a process for developing critical reflexivity. The CR model acts in a number of ways to support this investigation and to develop critical reflexivity in participants (method); in the researcher / teacher / trainer (facilitation); and research methodology (analysis). See Table 3 for an overview.

**Table 3: Overview of practical application of CR Model**

<b>CR MODEL</b>	<b>METHOD</b>	<b>FACILITATION</b>	<b>ANALYSIS</b>
<b>DIALOGICAL SPACE</b>	Social constructionist principles used to understand construction of reality and open possibilities for acceptance of multiple viewpoints	Facilitating a safe space, building trust, and social support	Participative and dialogical analysis with all involved.
<b>DECONSTRUCTING POWER</b>	Critical examination of how power is used (personal, structural, political)	A critical examination of power in the room (educator-learner; researcher – participant)	Awareness of positive and oppressive power practices. How is power talked about, questioned and challenged?
<b>VALUES &amp; IDENTITY</b>	Identifying values and building positive self and social identity.	Communal interaction for collective benefit and recognition of different views, collective negotiation for building social thinking and creating shared meaning.	Listening for contextual influences and social positioning. What is valued by the individual and group?
<b>RESPONSIBLE AGENCY</b>	Breaking myths and discourses, finding stories of strength for new perspectives on identity and meaning	Focusing on strengths and skills; ensuring all voices are heard.	Looking at shifts in position – how is the participant talking about him or herself, and has this changed?
<b>ACCOUNTABLE PERFORMANCE</b>	Bringing culture and the person into play – disrupting dominant discourses and taking action in terms of values and professed ethical position	Participatory, responsibility and accountability is negotiated with everyone involved	Looking for the “new” or preferred story. Has intention been transferred into action?

## **2.4 Methods and procedure: Data collection, analysis and presentation**

The methods for each phase of the research are explained in the chapters ahead. Once again I give only an overview of the approaches and methods in this section to provide an inclusive picture, and the details are shown in the relevant chapters (*see* Table 4).



**Table 4: An overview of research methodology**

<b>PHASE OF RESEARCH</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY APPROACH AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS</b>	<b>SAMPLE PARTICIPANTS/ PLACE</b>
<b><i>STORY OF SELF</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Qualitative</li> <li>➤ Narrative: Self-inquiry</li> <li>➤ Authoethnographic reflexive study</li> <li>➤ Heuristic enquiry (Clark Moustakas, 1990)</li> <li>➤ Dialogical and poetic inquiry</li> </ul>	Self (Student UKZN, Durban, SA)
<b><i>STORY OF EDUCATION</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Qualitative</li> <li>➤ Narrative: Life stories in education</li> <li>➤ Illustrative overview with 2016 HP students: Participatory and dialogical communication to explore experience</li> <li>➤ In-depth, descriptive case study with a refugee student</li> <li>➤ Investigation with HP students over a 12 year period</li> <li>➤ Dialogical and poetic inquiry</li> <li>➤ Interviews and group discussions</li> <li>➤ Creative and experiential data collection methods including reflecting in nature, cellphone photography, collage</li> </ul>	Purposive / convenience sampling UKZN, SA masters HP students:  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Illustrative overview: 11 Students, 2016</li> <li>2. Case study: 1 Student, 2015</li> <li>3. Data workshop: 10 Students, 2006-2015</li> </ol>
<b><i>STORY OF PRACTICE</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Qualitative</li> <li>➤ Narrative: Sharing life stories in community</li> <li>➤ Participatory action research with refugee youth</li> <li>➤ Dialogical and poetic inquiry</li> <li>➤ Focus groups and interviews</li> <li>➤ Creative data collection methodology including tree of life, drama, song, poetry, body mapping</li> </ul>	Purposive / convenience sampling refugee youth from DRC living in Durban, SA:  21 participants (12 – 18 years)

As can be seen from Table 4 above, a mix of narrative and reflexive methods was used in the study at a number of levels. Russell and Kelly (2002) view the entire research venture as ‘an interacting dialogical process’ in terms of which reflexivity and ongoing conversations with all involved in the research are vital. The authors remind us that reflexivity means that we need to suspend our judgment and not to make any quick assumptions as to the outcomes of the process; warning also that methodology that may work with one set of data will not necessarily ‘fit’ with another set. Overall, they stress that “no method of research inquiry can substitute for the need for researchers to engage in a reflexive relationships with data” (Para. 30). This was true in the present study as following a reflexive and narrative approach means listening closely to what is happening in the present and

following the stories, adapting methods that fitted what was happening in the moment, the needs of the participants, and the data itself.

The analysis of the data collected was also varied and multi-layered depending on the phase, context and purpose of the research. To capture the essence of experience, I follow a narrative approach; however, narrative analysis can take many forms and can be used as methods within other research methodologies (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Within in this approach I use a dialogical analysis method to partner with participants in exploring their experiences, and in most cases use poetry as poetic inquiry or presentation to add another layer to the interpretations offered and to give an open presentation of the words of participants in poetic format. The CR model was used as a guide to critically question the data and the analytical process. Other mixed methods that fitted well when exploring reflexivity as a process included using Grounded Theory to code in gerunds for action and processes as well as looking at thematic outcomes. These approaches are detailed in Chapter 4 (Paper 3: The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education; and Paper 4: Hindsight and foresight for better insight) in relation to education. Chapter 5 provides details of the participatory approach taken with refugee youth.

## **2.5 Creative methodology**

As reflexivity is a dynamic process of coming to understand how our actions are formed by and from others and that our reality is shaped overtime (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009); it is something that cannot be exposed through objective study. Reflexivity, by nature is subjective, and creative methodologies are needed to uncover it as an embodied experience. When what is asked of people is to change the way they think and perceive the world, to be open to alternative realities (Sliep & Kotze, 2007); we are asking about deep personal experiences. Bohm (1996) stresses that such understandings can be facilitated through social dialogue involving conversations being shared between people in reflexive relationship which enables movement from an individual to a more collective understanding and shared meaning. Sharing stories creates a base for such a dialogue, and experiential and creative exercises, often including expressive arts, are then needed to mine for this understanding – to tap into the subconscious to see how it is uniquely displayed in each individual. “To use the arts expressively means going into our inner realms to discover feelings and to express them through visual arts, movement, sound, writing, or drama” (Rogers, 1993, p. 2). Rogers (1993) sees this as a way of exposing our intuition, imagination, and emotions so that we can get a deeper insight into ourselves. This can be beneficial both for participants to reveal possibilities that are often dormant in everyday consciousness (Levine, 2011); and for researchers in terms of their own reflexivity and finding authentic ways to present the voice of participants. The use of poetry in qualitative research, for example, is now well established as a way to better represent participants’ voices and to take into

account the researchers' presence and emotions (Galvin & Prendergast 2016). Galvin and Prendergast (2016) sum up the importance of this: "If qualitative inquiry is to succeed then it must be adequately descriptive, reflect the thickness of living and communicate its processes and findings in rich and in-depth ways" (p. xi). Using poetry, creative, and artful methods were used throughout the phases and this is further detailed in the following chapters.

## **2.6 Reflexive supervision**

Very central to the dialogical process and method followed in this research was the ongoing, reflexive dialogue that took place between me and my academic supervisor. This requires special mention as it was a reflexive process that went beyond standard academic supervision and in that sense shaped the pathways of this research. This process is especially visible in the poetic dialogue that is presented in Chapter 3 in my paper on "Pathways to Reflection" on my own experience of reflexivity; but was integral to all phases, adding to the trustworthiness of the research (*see* 2.6 below). Anderson and Swim (1995) view clinical supervision as a 'collaborative conversation' between the supervisor and supervisee in terms of which "a postmodern dialogical model yields to a consultative action in which learning (change) takes place through discourse" (p. 1). In this model the supervisor is a mentor who facilitates an exploratory and collaborative conversational process that opens each party to learning and, "[in] this process, their voices connect and intertwine, constructing something new and different" (p. 2). It was the iterative dialogue with my supervisor that offered the backbone of this thesis, that kept me moving forward during times when it felt hopeless (for example, during the community project), and that sparked new ideas and directions. The 'intertwining' of our voices is apparent throughout and became possible through '*action-ing*' the overall approach of this project within our research relationship, which created a dialogical and ongoing reflexive space.

## **2.7 Trustworthiness and responsibility**

Reflexivity itself is seen as a tool for rigour, trustworthiness and ethical practice in qualitative research as it increases the credibility of the researchers work by honestly exposing his or her position and influence (Faulkner et al., 2016). However, although this may provide a solid basis for the approach in this study, I use a mix of methodologies focusing on both narrative and dialogical approaches. In terms of narrative, Loh (2013) is of the view that narrative inquiry should observe and be guided by both established criteria in the narrative field and in the broader qualitative arena for wider acceptance. He also asserts that it is not the facts themselves that are important, but how the facts are interpreted and what meaning is made from the inquiry. Although there are many different approaches to deal with these issues in narrative, methodological rigour should be visible and in keeping with quality procedures that have found consensus among the research community.

Loh (2013) further highlights the importance of considering issues of trustworthiness, verisimilitude, narrative truth and utility. In this sense, we are aiming at a validation that, in terms of Lincoln & Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability; and in terms of verisimilitude, an interpretation must 'ring true' and be believable (as used in Loh, 2013). Following this path means that what the research is trying to do is to make the 'best' sense of the data or stories to the exclusion perhaps of other possible interpretations. In following a dialogical approach, we are faced with a quandary as our aim here is not to box the analytical process but to open it to multiple interpretations (Frank, 2010). In a dialogical approach interpretations are considered valid if they are "responsible" (in itself a complex notion). Overall, Frank (2010) asserts: "A responsible relation to stories is a moral imperative, one aspect of which is never to control stories through their interpretations. The inescapable loop is that stories teach how to be responsible in response to stories." He is of the view, then that narrative analysis should not be about resolving contests of interpretation but rather about promoting dialogue – it should aspire to "have some affect on whether and how long people listen to each other's stories and how open they are to those stories" (p. 110 - 111).

As I follow overall a dialogical and reflexive approach, it is vital that I do not offer any interpretations as final or to claim any authority over these research findings. However, I do believe rigour and visibility is important, and in terms of Loh's (2013) views also find that assessing the process of the research through listed and recognised criteria is valuable, offering an openness that rather than 'finalising' the findings, actually can open it to others (the research participants, peers and audience) to make their own interpretations. Consideration of utility is also important in terms of both narrative criteria (Loh, 2013) and the transformative approach followed in this research. Utility of the research is detailed in the discussion section (*see* Chapter 6). For these reasons I have used a very open research process and detailed my methodology so that it can be verified by outside inspection. I have also clearly stated the theoretical foundations of this study and how I have applied the theory and the approach taken, including each of the steps taken the data collection and analysis. Careful planning was used to ensure that specific techniques were suitable for the purpose chosen in relation to the particular research participants and the focus of the phase of study. Further, findings have been well illustrated drawing on the actual words of participants using quotations and poetry.

Following a dialogical and participatory process has meant that the findings also closely reflect the experiences of participants, and this was re-checked in dialogue with participants as I was writing papers and exchanging ideas (member checking). Trustworthiness, in this sense, is closely tied with following an ethical approach to research (as highlighted below in 2.6), and being aware of my own biases and the need to forefront the research participants' voices and interpretations rather than my own ideas. Beginning with my own story of reflexivity changed the way that I approach research and led to a reflexive approach that makes it imperative for me to follow participatory methods as much as

possible, and acknowledges my subjectivity. This has required that I constantly reflect on my position of authority as a researcher. Further, the ongoing reflexive dialogue with my academic supervisor meant that there were continuous checks in place and discussions around possible interpretations and choices to be made in going forward (peer validation). In terms of the refugee youth project, I also worked closely with the gatekeeper, himself a refugee from the DRC and a HP master's graduate, and discuss this further below in the section on ethics.

Adopting criteria as was done by Loh (2013) from Lincoln & Guba's (1985) general criteria for trustworthiness; Loh's additional criteria more specifically in terms of narrative; and Frank's (2010) dialogical approach, I highlight the pertinent validity issues in relation to this study in summary below. I do this generally here as a reflexive "check" on the systems I put in place in following a reflexive, dialogical approach, which in places used different methodologies under this umbrella, rather than following a specific set of rules (*see* Table 5).

**Table 5: Overview of validation techniques used throughout the study**

CRITERIA	TECHNIQUES USED IN THIS STUDY
<b>General Trustworthiness criteria (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985)</b>	
Credibility (internal validity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The overall study used involved a variety of methods (triangulation)</li> <li>• There was prolonged engagement with participants (Education phase: involved data collection and feedback from students over a number of years. Community practice: five workshops over five weeks, an additional feedback session and ongoing youth involvement)</li> <li>• Member checking through continuous dialogue</li> <li>• Peer checking: ongoing, reflexive dialogue with academic supervisor</li> </ul>
Transferability (external validity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thick description: Acknowledgement of context through methodology and detailed description, e.g.in terms of own story and case study</li> </ul>
Dependability (reliability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of a range of qualitative methods for data collection, from interviews to creative methodology</li> <li>• Clear and detailed methodology</li> <li>• Clear theoretical frameworks</li> <li>• Careful recording of data and storage of data</li> </ul>
Confirmability (objectivity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying close to the stories and actual words of the participants</li> <li>• Acknowledging subjectivity rather than claiming objectivity and using reflexive methods to highlight researchers position</li> </ul>
<b>Additional narrative inquiry criterial (Loh, 2013)</b>	
Verisimilitude (believability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member checking and peer validation through dialogue and feedback</li> <li>• Process of publication in peer-reviewed journals opened up the process of peer and audience validation</li> </ul>
Utility (usefulness; contribution)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The aim of the study was to contribute to using the knowledge gained in educational and community contexts</li> <li>• The study contributes to understanding the development of critical reflexivity as a process, and offers a clear theoretical guide to better understand and ‘use’ the concept in practice</li> </ul>
<b>Dialogical inquiry criteria/ approach (Frank, 2010)</b>	
Ethical responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging subjectivity and bias</li> <li>• Taking a non-expert and participatory, dialogical approach</li> </ul>
Openness to multiple interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research based on social constructionist worldview and narrative and dialogical principles that forefront the voices of research participants</li> <li>• Facilitation of dialogical spaces as places for open conversation and stories to grow among participants</li> </ul>

## **2.8 Ethical Considerations**

The relational nature of narrative inquiry means that ethical issues are an important consideration throughout the research process (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Clandinin and Caine (2008) stress the importance of being sensitive and ‘wide-awake’ to ethical issues even after the research process is complete as inquiries “also become intervention,” impacting the participants and the researcher beyond the field (p. 544). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) consider two dimensions relating to ethics in research procedural ethics (administrative approval) and ‘ethics in practice’ (day-to-day ethical issues)

and draw on reflexivity as a resource to deal with important issues (p.262). Ultimately, the authors argue that although procedural ethics are an important reminder of fundamental principles relating to respect for autonomy and protection from harm for participants; the responsibility for conducting ethical research falls on the researcher in daily practice and that reflexivity should be an ongoing and active process throughout the research for both rigorous and ethical practice. In terms of working with youth in an African context, Skovdal and Abebe (2012) also stress the importance of going beyond institutional requirements and following a 'socio-ethical' approach "to highlight how fieldwork with vulnerable children is situated in social relationships that go beyond mere data collection" (p. 78). The authors argue that we should go beyond the usual requirements of doing 'good' and 'no harm' and that research should also empower research participants, taking into account the local context. To best achieve this, they argue, requires a reflexive approach, participation and ongoing dialogue throughout the research with all parties, especially the youth.

After obtaining approval for the overall research from the Ethics Committee at UKZN, I also obtained specific approval for the community practice project as it involved working with vulnerable youth. I therefore followed the required administrative procedures but also found that as I was working with personal stories and reflexivity, an overall ethical stance required more than this. Beginning with my own story meant that I put in place a reflexive process regarding my own position in the research from the start and this provided a base for me to remain reflexive throughout the research, constantly challenging my methods, checking on relationships in the research, and questioning 'my' findings. My focus on the dialogical grew throughout the process, beginning with the poetic dialogue I had with my academic supervisor during the first phase that developed into an ongoing reflexive, dialogical relationship which was invaluable as the research progressed. Valuable insight was also offered by the two research assistants who supported me during the community project, both of whom were also refugees themselves and therefore had a better perspective and insight into what was happening in the lives of the participants. The gatekeeper of the project who was also a research assistant is a well-respected member of the DRC community and played a pivotal role in helping me understand issues correctly from a cultural and historic perspective, as well giving me a better understanding of daily issues and hardships impacting the youth generally and in relation to their attendance at the workshops. A participatory dialogical approach that included multiple methods from interviews to dramas and poetry also meant that the participants, across phases, were invited to give continual feedback on findings in a number of ways. In terms of the youth project, participatory action research is considered a way to contextualise research locally and to benefit participants (Skovdal & Abebe, 2012).

As life story work often involves confidential, sensitive and possible traumatic information, it was made clear to students and participants that they were not required to share any information they did not want to share, and that confidentiality of results would be guaranteed. With all participants,

informed consent was first obtained and, in the case of minors in the community practice programme, the consent of guardians was first obtained. Where photographs or names have been used as part of the research which identifies participants, specific consent was first obtained and participants were given an opportunity to first read the article concerned if it was to be published. As there is always the possibility that participants may experience various degrees of traumatisation in the telling of their stories and witnessing the stories of others, this was closely monitored throughout the research and individual counselling was offered by my academic supervisor in the education context, and counselling was offered to the youth during the community practice programme through the psychology clinic at UKZN in cases of need. The latter did, however, prove to be problematic in the case of refugee youth who found the university setting and the counselling process to be foreign and this was viewed as quite stressful in itself. In light of this, the gatekeeper for the project who was a pastor of the local church community and well known to the youth, played an invaluable role in supporting youth who required additional counselling or support.

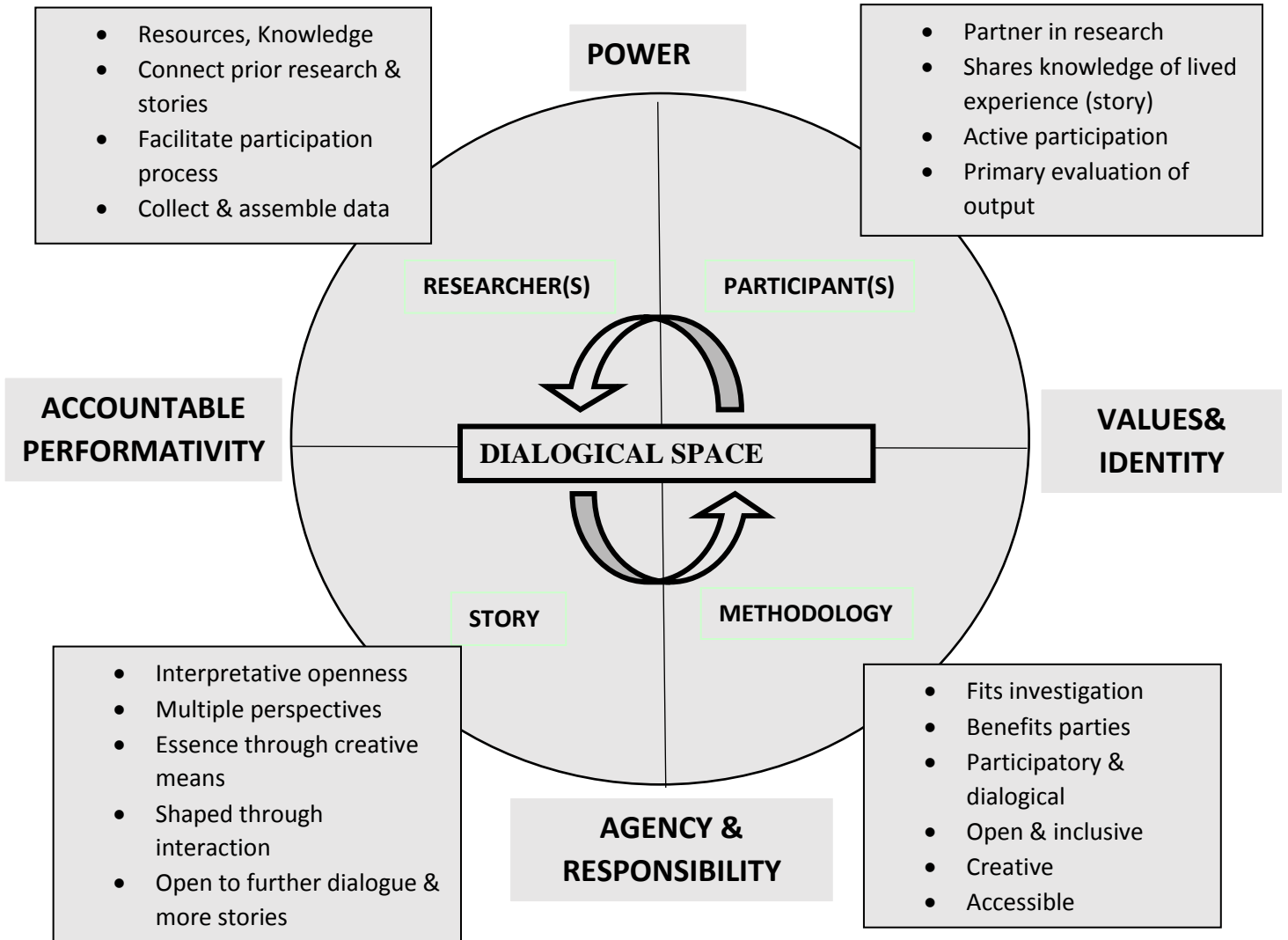
## **2.9 Conclusion**

I conclude this chapter with a diagrammatic illustration of the research process and approach (*see* Figure 6).



Figure 6

**DIALOGICAL REFLEXIVE RESEARCH PROCESS:**



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **STORY OF SELF**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

My journey into this research started with experiential life story work during my masters in HP. It was extended through continued dialogue and working closely with my academic supervisor on understanding the importance of creating critical voice through workshops and writing using narrative and poetic enquiry. These are used as tools to engage with the theoretical concepts related to reflexivity and to more deeply understand my voice and position. I journaled these experiences through reflexive writing and poetry, and this was used as a springboard for further dialogue and scrutinising my life story. Autobiographical self-reflection is considered an important aid in examining yourself and your practice (Graham, 2017). Beginning with my story became a way of challenging my assumptions and intentions about the overall research journey. This ‘first step’ of the research and autoethnography as a method, therefore, involves both process and product and a recognition that research is not neutral, objective or impersonal (Ellis et al, 2011). It is the start of an exploration into different ways of knowing and requires not just the telling of a story but also an analysis of the experience in terms of theory, reflexive method and research literature.

In this phase of the research I have explored my experiences of reflexivity and sharing my life story by following a heuristic enquiry (HI) approach as developed by Clark Moustakas (1990). The process has been described by him as one that attempts to discover the meaning and nature of phenomenon through internal pathways of self, using self-reflection and exploration of the nature of the phenomenon under study (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010). This approach was closely aligned to the process that developed spontaneously so was used to evaluate and record the journey and resulted in the creation of a more meaningful story that I believe placed me in a better position to continue on my research journey. HI was not used here as an original method of analysis but rather as a framework for self-study. In itself it is a reflexive process that calls for transparency and honesty. Using personal poetry further opened up the possibility of understanding and feeling (not just thinking) more deeply – enabling an embodied reflexive experience. This study was used as a basis to inform and develop the process in each subsequent phase of the research. As a reflexive project the process was organic and shaped through each understanding that emerged but was based and critically analysed in terms of theory.

### **3.2 Story of Self: An autoethnographic study**

**Paper 1:** Norton - Pathways of Reflection: Creating Voice Through Life Story and Dialogical Poetry

## **Pathways of Reflection: Creating Voice Through Life Story and Dialogical Poetry**

*Lynn Norton*

**Key words:** critical  
reflexivity; life  
stories; dialogical  
poetry; heuristic  
inquiry; agency;  
voice; lifelong  
learning

**Abstract:** In this article, I explore pathways towards critical reflexivity as a way of understanding the interaction between personal and professional development. How much do we, and can we, put our personal lives into our work? Reflexivity can be developed through various methods but is explored herein through life stories and dialogical poetry as ways of deepening the connection between personal discourses and professional lives. A heuristic inquiry framework developed by Clark MOUSTAKAS is used together with poetry and dialogue to map a personal exploration of reflexivity through life story work. The journey follows six phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination in a creative synthesis. Acknowledging that reflexivity is viewed as occurring in context, a narrative lens is used to integrate the importance of working with lived experience while recognizing how we are influenced by our past and present social interaction with others. In this way, as researchers and professionals, we are better able to position ourselves, to better understand the context in which we work, and to develop a more ethical lens through which we view our reality. The scope for personal agency and the creation of voice is explored through these interactions.

### **Table of Contents**

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Beginning the Journey](#)
- [3. Being Reflexive: Life Stories and Poetry](#)
- [4. Telling My Own Story](#)
- [5. Heuristic Inquiry](#)
- [6. Six Phases of Heuristic Research](#)
  - [6.1 Initial engagement](#)
  - [6.2 Immersion](#)
  - [6.3 Incubation](#)
  - [6.4 Illumination](#)
  - [6.5 Explication](#)
  - [6.6 Creative synthesis](#)
- [7. Moving Forward](#)
- [Acknowledgment](#)
- [References](#)
- [Author](#)
- [Citation](#)

## 1. Introduction

As a PhD student, I start my research journey by critically reflecting on who I am and how I position myself in relation to others, my context and my research. Questions emerge as I explore my own life story and I wonder from the outset: Does my story really matter? Does my race, culture, gender, the language I speak, place of origin, or age matter? Does it matter whether I am short or tall, overweight or thin, healthy or ill, whether I was bullied at school or was the bully, or who I love? Do these things matter more in certain contexts? Does race matter more, for example, because I am a white, heterosexual, middle-aged South African woman who grew up in privilege, within a context of a long history of apartheid and inequality? [1]

I think strongly that these things do matter (*not* because I think the categories themselves are important or are true representations of reality) but because I think context is complex and my view of the world has been shaped over time through the social, cultural and political environments in which I grew up. It has been shaped by my parents' teachings, big family gatherings, sugar cane landscapes, white privilege within a hostile and unfair political climate, marriage and motherhood, life and death. My life has been shaped through the interaction of the now many relationships formed and experiences I had while developing my ideas, through schools and university, working in the corporate world and in community settings. As CUNLIFFE (2008) asserts, "We are who we are because everything we say, think and do is interwoven with particular and generalized others: generalized groups, categories, language systems, culturally and historically situated discursive and non-discursive practices" (p.129). This process of "shaping" continues in my daily life. I bring into my research my whole story and, in turn, each of the research participants I meet (and all their stories) shifts my perceptions as we interact together. [2]

If I can become more aware of the biases I bring and render these visible, I can pursue a more ethical research path. The process I follow can be helpful for researchers in similar positions. GONZALEZ (2003) explicates four ethics for engaging in postcolonial ethnography, which have been applied also to autoethnography: accountability, context, community and truthfulness. In relation to truthfulness she calls for a radical openness to "see not only what is in one's social and environmental context, to see not only what one has actually done or said, but also to see that which is on the surface not visible" (in PATHAK, 2010, p.8). The purpose of this article is not to tell you my lived experience but to reveal any advantages (or disadvantages) of following a deeply reflexive process that challenges my own perceptions of reality, of how I see things. By exploring my own story, I set out to track pathways towards critical reflexivity as a means of enriching my understanding of my personal and professional development and, particularly, the interaction between them. I want to find out more about the conditions necessary to achieve and anchor reflexivity and the potential benefits of following a self-reflexive process in research and practice. I begin by looking at my own journey of reflexivity, exploring the value of using life stories and poetry

as a part of this process, and then delve more deeply into the internal search of self through heuristic inquiry. [3]

## 2. Beginning the Journey

Reflexivity can be developed in various ways, but I focus here on the telling and sharing of personal life stories, poetry and dialogue as routes towards deepening the exploration and connection between personal discourses and professional lives. I do this because it is through an increased awareness of context and content in terms of one's own "lived experience" (through stories) that space is facilitated for a better understanding of one's own position within the complexities of society, in this case, my South African context (SLIEP & KOTZE, 2007). I begin here with a small piece of my story about my father, in poetry form, that reflects on my past and reveals the importance of acknowledging where I come from. I used poetry because creative means often facilitate uncovering lived experience and shared meanings. Expressive arts, such as poetry, can be used evocatively to develop and contextualize these meanings leading to layers of insight (GALLARDO, FURMAN & KULKARNI, 2009).

"Dad

I remember black and white photographs, dad with a big fish, dad and his bride  
but he was all colour, red and fair  
once a blistered boy, then a man of long socks and handkerchiefs;  
sugar cane and litchi's; early morning fire and drought  
dad was land, and dogs, family breakfasts, smell of bacon  
he could divine water with a forked branch, nearly any old stick from the farm  
not everyone knew this.

Then emphysema came, and dragged him gradually by his collar, up and up, every  
step a cliff

and, unhurriedly, bit by bit caught each breath in a butterfly net  
blew each one away, soft froths in the wind, which altered course, and left,  
until there was hollow space around him and there was not enough air  
left for him.

He waited for my sister to arrive, then slipped away, two days slow, to go  
we sat with him, and as he left he passed to us, tiny trinkets in small cups  
so now I hear his whistle singing in my son, my daughter plays with his fire  
and much of me, is who he used to be.

And all that was left unsaid lies in wait, as his blessings come and go  
puff, puff, puff on an oxygen pump." [4]

As researchers, I believe we can never be purely objective and we always carry our baggage (our "selves") into our work. This poem reveals the impact my father

had on my life, and the importance of exploring all the experiences and interactions that have shaped me. I explore my reflexive pathways through an autoethnographic study of my own experiences of sharing stories, sharing poetry and through dialogue. Autoethnography has been described as an analysis of personal experience which helps us better understand cultural experience, as something that a researcher does and writes about and, in this sense, is "both process and product" (ELLIS, ADAMS & BOCHNER, 2010, §1). This exploration is a product of a collaborative inquiry process that has been enriched and deepened by the reflexive dialogue that took place throughout the process with my academic supervisor. She has guided this process and her voice is a part of the poetry that follows. [5]

My experience of reflexivity is examined using a heuristic inquiry approach as developed by Clark MOUSTAKAS (1990). The process has been described as an attempt to discover the meaning and nature of phenomenon through internal pathways of self, using self-reflection and exploration of the nature of the phenomenon under study (DJURASKOVIC & ARTHUR, 2011). This approach is closely aligned with the process that developed naturally from following a reflexive process. As a result, to evaluate and record my journey using this framework has been, I believe, a meaningful exposé of myself, personally and as researcher. The process became an opportunity for me to critically consider my research aims and to question my own lens, how my own views may be influential on my research findings. In itself, heuristic inquiry is a reflexive process that involves transparency and honesty, with recognition for the subjective nature of research. I journey down these pathways because I want to *experience* what emerges when one engages reflexively with life story using poetry and dialogical reflexivity to enter deeper levels of consciousness. I want to connect with the bigger picture from multiple perspectives. In MASLOW's words, "there is no substitute for experience, none at all. All the other paraphernalia of communication and of knowledge—words, labels, concepts, symbols, theories, formulas, sciences—all are useful only because people already knew them experientially" (cited in MOUSTAKAS, 1990, p.17). Will this experience be an opportunity for me, as well as the other researchers and practitioners, to better conduct research or work with others, and if so, in what ways? [6]

### **3. Being Reflexive: Life Stories and Poetry**

Life stories fall within the narrative research approach and are viewed in this article in terms of a social constructionist perspective, which recognizes knowledge is created in community, with others (GERGEN, 2009). While social constructionism generally is based on the view that we are intertwined with our social reality—each shaping and being shaped by the other—various orientations are possible within this approach (CUNLIFFE, 2008). In this article, I align with the idea of reality construction as a relational process. Our understanding of the world stems from our social interaction with each other ("selves-in-relation-to-others") rather than from a process of individual cognition (p.129). My attention turns to stories, poetry and dialogue, as all of these are shared conversations with and between the self and others, as ways of discovering and creating

meaning. Based on the assumption that our realities stem from interaction with each other, we need to be more reflexive about our own actions and understand that what we say will affect others. We need to be more reflexive and critical in challenging so-called essential truths as privileged by dominant discourses (SLIEP & KOTZE, 2007, p.140). [7]

Reflexivity itself has been defined in various ways but of relevance here and in line with the views above is a description of reflexivity as a "process of coming to an understanding of how one's actions are formed by and from the world and others" (GILBERT & SLIEP, 2009, p.468). The core of reflexivity then involves an ability to understand that reality is shaped over time, and that it is co-constructed communally (GERGEN, 2009). In relation to self-reflexivity, this involves understanding how we position ourselves and how our positioning is affected by dominant discourses. In acknowledging reflexivity itself as a relational process, it is viewed as occurring in context, as dynamic and iterative, influenced by our past and present social interaction with others and how we position ourselves in relationship (GILBERT & SLIEP, 2009). [8]

In telling our life stories, we are working with our lived experiences and linking our personal discourses to our professional lives and to society (SLIEP & KOTZE, 2007). Life stories are used to enable us to learn through our own experience which connects new knowledge to our own contexts (SLIEP, 2010). In this way, stories are viewed as tools for living that enable one to reflect and, therefore, to better understand, negotiate and create, leading to potential transformation on a personal and social level (SUAREZ-ORTEGA, 2013). Sharing stories becomes the basis for social dialogue between people in reflexive relationship, which includes movement from individual to shared meaning (BOHM, 1996). [9]

In my toolkit, alongside storytelling, I have added poetry both as a tool for digging and reflecting and as a form of presentation, building pictures of my experience. Poetry and poetic inquiry have been used in various ways in research, as a method for reporting research and as a tool for revealing deeper meaning (BRADY, 2009). It can be used as a way of tapping into the unconscious, both of the researcher and participants, and in the process, leads to greater insight (ROGERS, 1993) and depth of human experience (GALLARDO et al., 2009). We answer questions whereby we go beneath the surface; the experience is reflexive in nature and part of our storytelling process (BRADY, 2009). In contrast to the analytic scientific tradition, expressive arts research, including the use of poetry, specifically values subjectivity and aims to "expand and contextualise meanings" (GALLARDO et al., 2009, p.290). This is important in researching lived experience, and poetry is considered a particularly effective way of expressing and exploring this (GALLARDO et al., 2009; RICHARDSON, 1993). [10]



#### **4. Telling My Own Story**

Autoethnography is an approach involving the description and analysis of personal experience as a way of understanding cultural, social and political experience (ELLIS et al., 2010). Autoethnographies have been described as "written accounts about life experience of the person who is living and experiencing the researched phenomena" and as a means of permitting voice on issues founded on one's direct experiences (GALLARDO et al., 2009, p.288). The process is reflexive in nature. The researcher consciously immerses the self in relevant theory and practice to reveal an intimate and personal account of the phenomenon under investigation (MCILVEEN, 2008). I am looking at the process and product in full recognition that research is not neutral, objective or impersonal (ELLIS et al., 2010). It is the start of an exploration into different ways of knowing and requires not just the telling of a story but also an analysis of the experience in terms of theory, reflexive method and research literature. I hope to journey into a new form of knowing through reflexive practice, and I do this to add a layer of understanding to the experience of reflexivity for my future interaction with others. [11]

Autoethnography has various limitations and criticisms as a research method; an example of which is that autoethnographers are too absorbed in personal experience and that they use only their own biased data rather than being more involved in fieldwork. However, ELLIS et al. counter such arguments by contending that autoethnographers take a different view to research and that the most important questions to be considered here are "who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?" (§39). The focus of evocative autoethnography is on narrative accounts that involve emotional responses and open conversations. This aligns well with a critical, ideological paradigm as the role of power in shaping our realities is emphasized (MCILVEEN, 2008). This layer of research is intended to begin a process of facilitating my own critical consciousness and voice. It can be viewed as the start of a dialogue, which forms the basis of an inquiry into reflexive methodologies. [12]

#### **5. Heuristic Inquiry**

Clark MOUSTAKAS (1990) views heuristic research as a "process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis" (p.9). He believes this process to be essential for any type of investigation that involves the consideration of human experience. He believes this process of discovery can lead to new meanings and images of human experience, as well as realizations relevant to one's own experience and life. The value of the process lies in this two-fold effect of discovering the essential meanings of a particular experience and, at the same time, awakening and transforming the self. In this way, self-growth occurs as your self-understanding increases (ibid.). Learning emerges progressively and organically during the process of the inquiry. [13]

MOUSTAKAS (1990) is clear on what he terms an "unshakable connection" between what is outside, our context, and what is within a person in terms of

thought, awareness and feeling (p.12). Not only is the personal subjective nature of the researcher recognized, it is an essential part of the process. To be personally involved in the process enables the researcher to understand and see things in different ways, which, in turn, requires one to look to the self, recognize self-awareness and value own experience. Heuristic inquiry is an attempt to discover the meaning and essence of the phenomenon under study through self-reflection and self-discovery (MOUSTAKAS, 1990). It encourages a researcher to openly explore and follow an internal "creative path" so that one is able to find meaning from within (DJURASKOVIC & ARTHUR, 2011, p.1572). This requires an investigator to have a personal encounter with the experience being investigated, and it is in the telling of one's own story of the experience that leads to the possibility of personal transformation (MOUSTAKAS, 1990). Heuristic inquiry is, therefore, more than just a methodology; it can also be viewed as a process or skill, which involves an ability to sharpen one's perceptions, so that reflection then leads to the discovery of new insights and greater self-awareness (HILES, 2013). I have applied concepts from heuristic inquiry to my personal process so that I am better able to evaluate my experiences within the heuristic inquiry framework. I use the framework more to describe and further explore my experiences rather than as an original method of inquiry. [14]

## **6. Six Phases of Heuristic Research**

With heuristic inquiry, I can explore reflexivity through six phases. I begin my journey (*initial engagement*) by investigating the question, "What emerges when you engage reflexively with your life story?" This is followed by an *immersion* in the topic and I am required to "live" the question, a period of *incubation* allowing for the inner workings of the tacit dimension to extend my understanding, which leads to *illumination* and the development of themes and a deeper awareness. The threads of my experience are drawn together in the *explication* phase resulting in a final *creative synthesis* illustrating a meaningful representation of my overall experience (DJURASKOVIC & ARTHUR, 2011; NUTTAL, 2006). I explore each phase through collaborative poetic inquiry and dialogue. [15]

### **6.1 Initial engagement**

This initial phase involves the discovery of an intense interest in a phenomenon that has important personal implications for the researcher and social meaning. In this phase, I immerse myself in self-exploration to discover tacit knowledge, which leads to my research question (MOUSTAKAS, 1990). My engagement with reflexivity as a tool and a process of discovery began early in my master's degree during a teaching module, which used a life story methodology to explore the interaction between the personal and the professional (SLIEP, 2010; SLIEP & KOTZE, 2007). The experience of sharing my life story and witnessing the stories of others in the group was meaningful on a personal level, in reflecting on the self, and on a relational level. The social implications of this shared experience became evident as our stories unfolded, and we became shaped as a group. [16]

During the course, we shared information about ourselves using a "tree of life" metaphor looking at our historical roots, what has formed us, the fruits of our achievements on personal and professional levels, and our future hopes, the blossoms of our trees (ibid.). Drawing from this experience, my initial engagement involved looking closely at my ancestral roots, where I have come from. Of significance are the reflections within the story, the first being that I was almost given to another family after my birth at the hospital. I reflected on how environment can have influences on who you become. What if the baby swap had not been discovered, would I still be "me" if I had grown up in a completely different world? My journey of reflexivity began with that question through which I was able to look at my life more critically, my past, present, future and the different roles I have played. Who was I now and where was I going? These questions are embodied in the poem I wrote shortly after writing my life story, as a mature student, a mother of three children, returning to my studies, entitled "From Motherhood":

"I sit in my comfort, a tight-knit pit, hugging home, knees pulled in  
yet crave, starve, arms stretch for more,  
life spent, can't grieve, not so easy just to leave.  
Ripples of a larger tide promise novel scent,  
how far should I sniff beyond my own sleepy waters?  
Doubt slides about, mistress of my mistiness, will not hide  
despite her unrest and shallow disquiet,  
more than daughter, mother, bride wife.  
I will hitch up my skirt, once more, and stride  
I must go further, or rust." [17]

This poem shows me that I want to be more than the roles society ascribes to me and pushes me to look more closely at the traditional roles that I have played, their construction in the South African context. I ask, "How can I go further, stand in my strength, and what responsibly will this bring?" Of particular interest in the phenomenon of reflexivity for me is the opportunity to develop and identify one's voice (the ability to question, to speak out, to share and tell) and the creation of critical voice, one that starts to question the truths that come from our stories. Experiencing my life story directed me, pushed me forward—mentally and physically—into action; I had to go further. I needed to journey into my own experience but with a view to engaging with the phenomenon more widely to consider its social implications in the following phases of my research. The poem was an unintended expression of my intentions, through which I was able to form my research question, "What is my experience of engaging in reflexivity through life story and poetic expression?" I needed to discover tacitly what was happening, what the experience meant to me. MOUSTAKAS (1990) describes tacit knowledge as a "capacity that allows one to sense the unity or wholeness of something from an understanding of the individual qualities or parts," and he describes how we can sense the "treeness of a tree" or its "wholeness" by having knowledge of all its parts and qualities. MOUSTAKAS notes further that "[t]his

knowing of the essence or treeness of a tree is achieved through a tacit process" (pp.20-21). Where did I want to go? What was holding me back? Would this process help me to find out? [18]

## 6.2 Immersion

In the second phase of inquiry, the researcher becomes one with the topic and must live the question. Living the question involves self-searching and following your intuition, listening to clues and hunches (MOUSTAKAS, 1990). MOUSTAKAS refers to this as getting "inside the question" through an immersion in the experience, which is open-ended and self-directed (p.15). In self-dialogue, the researcher converses with the phenomenon, "allowing the phenomenon to speak directly to one's own experience, to be questioned by it," so that multiple meanings can then be uncovered (p.16). The process involves not only the intellect but also emotion, with the researcher attempting to understand the phenomenon in its wholeness and unique patterns of experience (MOUSTAKAS, 1990). My self-dialogue, between a younger "she" and older "me," as a form of reflection was worked into a pantoum poem. This form of poetry is derived from Malayan poetry having patterns of repeated lines, which link new meanings back to what has been said earlier in the poem (SCHUSTER & COETZEE, 2014). I used this format to find the rhythm or essence of the dialogue, to enter a deeper understanding and to allow more questions and answers to emerge.

"Silence

It's me and she, we lived through different stories,  
our words seem speechless, our silence untold, we hold it differently.  
Her silence is a forest, she is held, cocooned,  
my silence is an empty stone, it is cold.

Our words seem speechless, our silence untold, we hold it differently.  
What about the whispers, stories round the fire?  
My silence is an empty stone, it is cold.  
Sad, strange silence, shall we crash and burn her down? Or make a hole?

What about the whispers, stories round the fire?  
I want always to return, to lie in moss and mud.  
Sad, strange silence, shall we crash and burn her down? Or make a hole?  
It is my forest, stone may be cold but the trees embrace me.

I want always to return, to lie in moss and mud,  
Her silence is a forest, she is held, cocooned,  
It is my forest, stone may be cold but the trees embrace me.  
It is me and she, we lived through different stories." [19]

Moving beyond self-dialogue and bringing in an outside voice, I probed what was beginning to emerge from the poetry: "What happens when you tell your story? And, what happens when you don't?" I found I needed to explore what the effect of telling my story had on me, and what my experience was of not telling parts of my story, my experience of silence. My relationship with reflexivity was under scrutiny and I was clinging to my silence in defense. I realized also there are (and will be) different perceptions of the same experience; it will never be seen and felt in the same way. With reflexivity especially, uniqueness disallows any simple answers, but it is still important to look and to interrogate the developmental stages you go through, to see how your story shapes you at different times of your life. Further, this exchange was not just about me. With witnessing the stories of others in the class, as we shared our stories together in a dialogical space, I was able to have a closer reflection on my own story as well. Listening to many difficult stories, from fellow South Africans and others from around the African continent, showed clearly how protected and privileged I have been and the importance of acknowledging this position, my struggles with white guilt, and the responsibilities attached to privilege. In turn, it shows the importance of not remaining silent, but of engaging in the conversation. [20]

### 6.3 Incubation

During incubation, the researcher moves away from the intense immersion with the question and becomes more detached from it. This period is a time for inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to work below the surface and to clarify understanding and perhaps, also to extend it beyond immediate awareness (MOUSTAKAS, 1990). Intuition has been described as the "bridge between the explicit and the tacit ... an internal capacity to make inferences and arrive at a knowledge of underlying structures or dynamics" (p.23). During this period of research, I moved away from the personal and the intensity of self-reflexivity to discover, in dialogue with my academic supervisor, as we worked together with poetry, the theory behind "reflexivity" as a psychological and social phenomenon. This put a distance between myself and the phenomenon, as I took a more objective stance, defining and breaking down the more theoretical aspects of reflexivity.

#### "Guiding Voice

Go to where the feelings are hidden, whisper deep inside  
the place that does not judge so academically, seeking texture,  
incubating heart and soul.

Searching and exploring, an adventurer peeping through the reeds  
feeling, living, being in the unknown, walking in quicksand  
nearly drowning, sinking deeper still, then letting go.

Writing without structure or rules, no tricky devices, some basic tools  
experiential teacher looking quizzically at prose, guiding side by side,  
tearing information into pieces, sewing back a tapestry of poetry." [21]

The poem depicts an important part of the process of reflexivity, a conversation through fertile ground that is adventuresome but at the same time, nonjudgmental, a time for growth. It is the dialogue that helps one see things from different angles, to seek new perspectives and to go beyond. My experience of reflexivity has not been a seamless journey and has involved much discomfort and feelings of anxiety. I have been "stuck" often and realize the need for support and dialogue to move forward. As reflexivity is co-constructed communally (GERGEN, 2009), we acknowledge the importance of relationship and despite this first phase of research focusing on my own story, my experience of reflexivity is relational. It involves (and cannot be separated from) my audience (students who were part of my master's class, who witnessed my life story and whose stories I witnessed) and ongoing dialogue with my supervisor. GILBERT and SLIEP (2009) discuss the process as dynamic and iterative, influenced by our interaction with others. In this way, my journey is shaped not just by my own self-reflection but also by a dynamic process of relation with others and in the context of my research. [22]

The process of my reflexivity since the initial life story work was continuous and involved a variety of methods that facilitate reflection including keeping reflective notes, free writing, poetry, reflective and ongoing dialogue, and doing collage work. I also attended and presented this work at the ESREA (European Society for Research on the Education of Adults) 2015 conference on "Stories that make a difference" to learn more from the life history and biography network. This experience accentuated that learning comes from many places. This was an important part of the incubation process, learning more while allowing my inner knowledge to brood. [23]

VAN SCHALKWYK (2010), in support for her collage-life-story elicitation technique (a method for scaffolding life story remembering), discusses the importance of scaffolds and the use of different methods of expression (linguistic and nonlinguistic) in support of narrating life experiences. She describes scaffolding as "a system or process of supporting and/or priming life story remembering and narrative performance" and "a process of eliciting experiences from the past that have or could have significant meanings to the identity construction" (pp.676-677). The various methodologies explored add a different layer to my insight, a new perspective and are the scaffolds that support the development of a reflexive lens. Working reflexively is a dynamic process and requires embracing the possibility of multiple meanings. These do not emerge automatically; they are often hidden and need to be coaxed out. Through each exercise I made new connections, I started to tie the threads of my stories together, my personal and professional self, as reflexive researcher. With increased conscious awareness, this becomes known in the following phases. The poetry helps me to do this as thinking about it rationally gets me "stuck" on my defense mechanisms.

"new connections  
charmed from the belly  
shape me." [24]

#### 6.4 Illumination

MOUSTAKAS (1990) explains this phase of inquiry as something that "unfolds" as the researcher becomes ever more open to the tacit dimension of intuition and knowledge. The researcher explores themes emerging into awareness that were not directly present as part of the researcher's consciousness and which reveal new insights. The themes that emerged for me begin with the need to acknowledge my ancestral background and the different roles I have played throughout my life, including the developmental stages I have been through and the shape these took. The unfolding begins as I start to identify my layers and tie together where the personal intercepts with the professional, adding in the political context as the lines between these layers start to blur. As I became more steeped in the experience of reflexivity, I found that the poetry I was writing was becoming more personal and I wrote a number of poems about my parents and growing up in South Africa. I felt the entanglement of the personal with the professional, the lack of separation between the two was emerging in my poetry. Rather than something realized theoretically, it revealed itself to me in my writing and focus. I was immersed in my own context and this was now becoming known. [25]

JONES (2005) emphasizes about performativity, your words not just as communication but rather as action in the construction of your identity, as an indicator that it is not possible to separate your life story from the contexts in which it is formed. Further, she says the various forms of personal narrative "enmesh the personal within the political and the political within the personal in ways that can, do and must matter" (p.774). My felt realization that this is the case—that "my" personal and "your" personal matters—is of significance in my professional work and my stance as a researcher, especially in working with life stories. I kept returning, more deeply, to my own story. Experiencing the telling of my story and witnessing the stories of others revealed unmistakably the significance of acknowledging your context and how this influences the way we view the world. This is evidenced in the poetry I wrote through the year on my roots, growing up white, in privilege, during the apartheid years in South Africa and in acknowledgment of the ongoing effect this still has on me:

"When I was growing—up apart  
history twisted, her story skewed and shaped an other view  
I want to vomit white guilt out, see this tree differently,  
beauty unscarred  
impossible" [26]

On my father who passed away from a long struggle with emphysema ("Dad")  
and the silent strength of my mother, a survivor of breast cancer

"she never complained out loud  
even when they cut  
a hole in her chest  
after all the veins  
in her arms  
had been  
bled  
dry" [27]

Generally, the process of placing your life in context and reflecting on your own and others' positions (past and present) is a time for us to question our thought processes and those of others around us. What did I take from the experiences of my father and mother, what parts of me are *who they used to be*? Such an investigation, in turn, facilitates an understanding of how our thoughts are shaped so we can move towards a position in which we become able to overcome what BOHM (1996) refers to as an essential difficulty: "that we automatically assume that our representations are *true pictures of reality*, rather than relative guides for action that are based on reflexive, unexamined memories" (p.xiii). What BOHM suggests is that we do not attempt to change the process of representation but that we become mindful of the fact that our representations, which we instinctively recognize as reality, may not be real or true. In this way, we engage in what he calls a form of "reflective intelligence" (ibid.). To take this further, I also need to question how this understanding (that my historical and contextual lens has shaped me, constructed my view of the world) will make a difference. Why is this important? How does it have impact on my research and on my profession? [28]

Considering my personal history and context more closely invites a process that leads to me troubling my position. Who am I to do the work and research that I want to do? What ethical dilemmas will arise as I start to question my position as an older, white woman working amongst youth from various race groups in a society that is still very marked by our apartheid history? I need to acknowledge not only the lens that shapes my thinking, but that I come from a position of not knowing. I believe this is where the value of listening to and witnessing the life stories of others lies. You listen because you do not know, and you listen because you understand that each person is the expert of his or her own life. With the process of exploring your own story, of being deeply reflexive, you are able to see the depths and uniqueness of your own internal pathways in such a way that it is impossible not to understand that you cannot know for another. If that is so, you cannot speak for another. How do I solve these dilemmas? [29]



## 6.5 Explication

The explication phase of inquiry involves a deeper examination of themes that have emerged and the researcher engages in focusing, indwelling, self-exploration, and self-disclosure. Indwelling refers to a process of turning inward to look for a deeper understanding of the experience and to "draw from them every possible nuance, texture, fact, and meaning" (MOUSTAKAS, 1990, p.24). The researcher starts to recognize the uniqueness of his or her own and others' experiences, and begins to build a more complete picture of the phenomenon (MOUSTAKAS, 1990). What is involved is an unfolding analysis to clarify meaning and expose new knowledge that has surfaced during the reflexive process. The importance of this phase is to go into detail, to closely examine what you are now becoming aware of, to understand each of the "various layers of meaning" (p.31). [30]

I was prompted to engage with nature, which surrounds my current living space, to let nature resonate the many experiences that the self-reflexivity was doing. It was time to engage more deeply with the themes that had become known, to feel and explore each layer and to grapple with these feelings. Here again, clarification came to me not just through an analysis of my own story but as part of the ongoing dialogue I was having with my academic supervisor. My learning was happening in conversation. This is illustrated in the following poems offering a dialogue beginning first with the voice of my supervisor, Yvonne SLIEP, and then followed by my own, and recognizing the importance not just of self-reflection but also of performativity, moving me towards an answer to the question posed above: Why are these understandings important?

"you find your essence  
under the milkwood tree  
connecting with earth  
on a cellular basis a  
bleeding tree giving  
sacred status milky  
latex laces  
covering layers of white guilt  
under the milkwood tree  
you find your essence  
can you move  
from your position of complacency  
where thinking is honoured  
and feelings are covered  
can you enter the night  
make yourself big  
knock on the chest

of the uniformed police  
can you  
can you use  
use your knowledge  
your position of privilege  
use it to protect  
can you?" (SLIEP) [31]

The focus of the poem is on how reflexivity can sharpen your vision and deepen your compassion and your knowledge, help you make a difference. In this way, reflexivity is viewed as going beyond a self-reflective process that is passive, to one that is active, dynamic and interactional. It challenges and probes. In answer, I become more aware of my self-doubt, where I am strong and where I am weak, what shapes me. My awareness is directional and my voice more critical. This is the experience of reflexivity in dialogue.

"I sit in shade, silent  
under milkwood  
beneath gnarled, sprawling branches  
I want to remain  
to lie in moss and mud.  
It is my forest,  
the trees embrace me.  
I sit in shade  
see new shapes,  
old tides of experience  
wash over  
layer, upon layer.  
Your words whisper  
and I wish,  
fiercely now  
for knuckled fist.  
I climb." [32]

From this poetic dialogue grew an increasing recognition of just how important it is to bring all the threads together and bring all of me into the picture. Such recognition is valuable not only in respect of making visible your subjective lens but also in your ability to make a difference. To make all the threads visible means you are able to look out for pitfalls, but you are also able to make full use of all your experiences and your resources. The positive aspects of your own power can be harnessed constructively rather than destructively. What has been asked of me is to enter my blind spots and particularly look more closely at my own relationship with power, my preference for steering away from confrontation

and not taking advantage of power that I do have, that could be used to help others more effectively, at higher levels. I see even more clearly, my personal intersecting with my professional choices, with which I can explore further options and possibilities. Twisting these threads together, my experience in law, education, research, as daughter, wife, mother—my life—I begin to see the whole tree and how this can shape my future professional work. [33]

With such wholeness, I am able to find answers I did not know I was looking for at the beginning of the process, how I can position myself in relation to my research, and how it may be just the possibility of making a difference that may be all that is needed to be able to move forward. Through further dialogue and poetry, I realized how easy it is to become stuck, so worried about doing the wrong thing, that I do nothing. The more I think with my head, rather than in my heart (with all of me), the more blocked I become and the less I actively do. My personal history is entwined with my professional decisions, which once recognized, I could explore possibilities for making decisions based on an active awareness of my positioning. Beyond being a researcher, I am also a trained attorney who has worked in commercial and community law. I work with street children, and my research has involved school projects and working with refugee youth, yet I contest my position, as a middle class white woman. Who am I to do this work? And yet, who am I not to? If not me then who, where do my responsibilities lie? *Wounded children ...*

"they are everywhere  
in the neighbourhood  
in schools  
even on the streets  
children with unheard needs  
anger and fear follow them  
like shades that trip and stab  
what kind of world are we living in" (SLIEP) [34]

I sat in the park, doing a collage reflecting on this process and my research. I found a tulip in a dustbin, cut out yellow drops of rain, drew a tree and wrote the word "possibility." Collage, as an investigative tool, "allows the researcher to work in a non-linear and intuitive way by arranging image fragments that reveal unconscious connections and new understandings" (BUTLER-KISBER & POLDMA, 2010, p.2). BUTLER-KISBER and POLDMA (2010) explain how this process can add to the scaffolding of reflection by working from feelings first and then to thoughts, rather than the other way which is more common with written thoughts. In this way, it is possible for the collage artist to bring to the fore understandings and connections that previously remained hidden or part of tacit knowledge. I did not know at the time what connections I was making but on further reflection and in poetic dialogue; I realize we cannot ever know the result of an act we set into motion at a particular time. We may never know it, but it is possible that if space is created giving people an opportunity to share their life

stories that somewhere in the future, possibly, an event is described that creates conditions for the budding of a blossom that results in a fruit. I will not be able to do it all, but I can help facilitate the creation of healing spaces, building bridges through working collectively with others who bring different skills and knowledge. [35]

I know from this journey that I cannot know the lives of others; I am still learning my own. But it is through this knowledge, I think, that I am in a better position than I was before to go forward with my research. I have reaffirmed my belief in working through life stories and the need to follow a reflexive process, to come from a position of “not knowing” when I listen to the stories of others throughout my research. Overall, this journey has led me to believe in the possibility of growth and hope, and an acceptance of who I am and an awareness of the importance of being clear about my subjectivity. This is my insight.

"Yellow Rain

Face to face with my reflection

I question my belonging

Who am I to do this?

Who am I not to?

Face to face with my reflection

I question my belonging

I am me, I have myself to offer

I question my belonging

I can evaporate or stand

Who am I not to?

Live in the veins of others

I question my belonging

I am this moment

I have myself to offer

That is all I have to offer

I can evaporate or stand

I can open my arms

Live in the veins of others

I am yellow rain

I am this moment

I offer myself, as I am

That is all I have to offer

I can offer no more

I can open my arms

Who am I to do this?

I am yellow rain

I offer myself, as I am

I am me, I can offer no more  
Face to face with my reflection" [36]

## 6.6 Creative synthesis

The final stage, if one can talk of such an organic process having a final stage, is an integration of the data and themes that have been discovered and are presented in a creative form like a narrative, poem, painting, or story. This is done "in such a way that a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realized" (MOUSTAKAS, 1990, p.32). For me, this was the discovery of my understanding (my truth) as a concept that can be shaped and will be different for different people and for myself at different times. I started to intuitively feel and understand the dangers of searching for and asserting any kind of truth, and intuitively to embody the constructionist view that there is no single truth. GERGEN and GERGEN (2004) liken declaring the truth to setting language in a "deep freeze" and in that way, diminishing the potential for new meaning to develop. They contrast this to a constructionist view, which calls for open dialogue, "in which there is always room for another voice, another vision and revisions, and further expansion in the field of relationship" (p.25). [37]

Feeling reflexivity is the experience of theory through increased self-awareness, of understanding it experientially rather than theoretically. Reflexivity through life stories and poetry exposes the frailness of your truth. This process has also revealed the value of dialogue in the reflexive process, a conversation that takes you further than you can go on your own, asks you the questions that you may otherwise avoid, makes your search deeper. What emerges is awareness of the importance of speaking your truth and understanding that it is only your truth, the process shapes you.

"my  
truth  
dry clay  
will crumble  
in conversation  
and a new truth will be moulded" [38]

The structure of this poem is based on the Fibonacci sequence, a number pattern referred to as the "Golden Ratio" and used in poetry to "mirror the growth pattern we so often see in nature" (SCHUSTER & COETZEE, 2014, p.86). I used this structure to bring my meanderings into sharp focus, to discover in process new truths. *If I tell you the truth, I will absorb you, no tiptoeing anymore.* [39]

## 7. Moving Forward

JONES (2005) asks us to see how we can use our words to make a difference and challenges us in our attempts at autoethnography to create work that is not just moving but that creates movement: work that encourages dialogue and debate about issues we consider significant to the world. It is in the embodiment of our work, the inclusion of ourselves and our emotions in our work, that the possibility arises for our words to be heard more meaningfully, and that as researchers and practitioners, we will be better able to understand our positioning and to work, non-judgmentally and with deeper understanding. MOUSTAKAS (1972) emphasizes,

"To know something from all levels, to experience the deepest truth concerning oneself and others, it is necessary to retreat within, to engage in a process of open inquiry and meditation that will reveal one's self to oneself. Only then is the person ready to act" (p.4). [40]

"Knowing" that is relationally responsive is linked to self-understanding and has been described as "relational and dialogic *implicit knowing from within*, situated in embedded and contextualized understanding" (CUNLIFFE, 2008, p.133). The implication is that our stories do matter, but more than this, it is also *how* we understand our own and others stories that will make a difference. [41]

Contextualized understanding can be a space for agency in which we are able to move forward with socially responsible choices in our lives. BANDURA (2006) views agency as an ability to intentionally influence your life circumstances and functioning. As such, it involves being proactive and reflexive, being more than just an "onlooker." This, in turn, involves recognition of the "duality between human agency and social structure," that as people we are not just products of our life circumstances, but that we are also contributors (p.164). In process, I have realized I could take all the parts of me, my whiteness, my femaleness, my education and experience to facilitate agency more effectively than when I hide, scared, behind stereotyped roles. [42]

I look back now to trace my agency, to see how it has been shaped through this process. I track agency by creating a "voice poem" or "I poem" using "I" phrases from my work, listed in order of appearance and presented as a poem. Researchers have used voice poems to listen closely to the research participant's first-person voice, to see how they talk about themselves, as a way of understanding the sense of self in terms of their values and the development of agency (GILLIGAN, 2015; KOELSCH, 2015). A pattern emerges as my personal agency strengthens, my voice first "found" then "used" more actively in my professional life, initially in the writing of this article and going forward with my research. I reflect now on the number of times I have returned to this process and the poetry, how you can know something but not believe it fully, how it is difficult to move forward, to become a contributor (an active agent). The poem below tells me that I have moved, that I have shifted my position.

"Looking for voice  
 I remember, I hear  
 I was growing  
 I look  
 I look  
 I want to  
 I can't  
 I choke (looking)  
 I sit, I sniff  
 I will  
 I must (deciding)  
 I want, I want  
 to coax her, hold her, cajole  
 her  
 create her  
 Voice  
 I sit (waiting)  
 I want  
 I wish (wishing)  
 I climb (starting off)  
 I question (questioning)  
 I have  
 I can (deciding)  
 I am  
 I am (finding)  
 I tell you  
 I will (using)  
 I am (found)" [43]

Embodied in these reflections of life story work is the narrative reflexive framework offered by SLIEP and NORTON (2016) who view the reflexive process as involving four iterative loops: deconstructing power; determining values and identity; negotiating agency and responsibility; and accountable performance. This is an iterative process at the center of which is the dialogical space where relational reflexivity is facilitated and around which the story or experience is developed. Working through these loops leads ultimately to living a preferred story, to action that is not just individually but also socially beneficial (ibid.). As

such, reflexivity is a process facilitating continuous and critical evaluation; helping us to move forward. In relation specifically to my reflections here, you gain strength through the process, not just a sense of agency but also the "doing" of agency, leading one towards relational performativity and future possibility.

"Together we build

possibilities

to respond

collectively

to create

the landscape

in which we want

to birth

our legacy" (extract from a poem by Yvonne SLIEP in SLIEP & NORTON, 2016, p.263). [44]

My exploration is ongoing and I am able, albeit tentatively, to move into the world and bring a deeper understanding to my research and work with others. I believe that such a reflexive process opens the way for conducting authentic and ethical research in terms of which there is a genuine belief in the value of listening to each other's stories. Because of the uniqueness of our stories, it is impossible to understand someone fully without in some way walking in their shoes (understanding context). In relation to research, this is important as I believe that studies not contextually based, that do not take into account the story behind, cannot get to the heart of the issue being investigated. A researcher who claims objectivity is working under false pretenses. It is imperative to be open and honest so that our biases (and we all have them) can be taken into account. In a professional context, for example, in health promotion, the same holds true. We need to approach others from a position of "unknowing," truly believing they are the experts in their own lives. For example, my research with refugee youth from the Democratic Republic of the Congo living in South Africa means I have to challenge my position. How can I ever begin to understand their experiences, hopes and dreams? I cannot, unless I am open to listen and to learn, and I cannot speak on their behalf. (Who am I to do that?) What I can do though is to facilitate spaces for these youth to grow their own knowledge—to understand how power operates in their lives, to discover their own identities and values and to develop their own agency and voice. [45]

My experience teaches me more about the importance of engaging in a dialogical space(s), what this really means and the methodology that makes this work. This space needs to be one of trust and non-judgment, where someone is encouraged to self-explore (to go within) and to connect to others, and to the environment (our whole context). It is a space where the heart matters and where personal stories matter, where we begin to see how the stories have impact on our practice. True knowing, I believe, can never be purely academic—our personal and professional paths crisscross. Our scaffolds of discovery are built from within



and with others—through stories, poetry and other creative ways that allow for the budding of our intuition and tap into our indigenous knowledge. It is our awareness of how our personal informs our professional that will facilitate better outcomes for those with whom we work. In these ways, we are able create a critically reflexive lens through which to view the world. [46]

Experiencing my reflexive journey and writing this article has been bumpy—long and slow. I have revisited different parts of my story and different phases of reflection many times and along the way have made many new discoveries. Retrospectively, I have found that the true value lies in the time that the process has taken, how awareness evolves with more clarity through dialogue, including feedback from the reviewers of this article who then also became part of the reflexive process. In the end, I realize, it is not about just understanding reflexivity as a concept; it is about experiencing it, engaging with it and developing a continual practice of reflexivity. It is about learning tools to enable us to remain reflexive, whether in our research or practice. There are no short cuts and reflexivity requires ongoing commitment. We need to become lifelong learners, faithful to reflexive engagement (SLIEP, 2010). This changes the way I will look at my future research and practice. Critical learning spaces need to be created for the active exchange of ideas in dialogue, revisiting awareness and building in time for anchoring reflexivity, not as something to be done, but as something that becomes a part of the way you do things (the way you research or the way you approach your profession). We need to keep the conversation alive to understand dialogue as a practice that is socially situated and, therefore, dynamic so that we are better able to link our reflexive practices to a transformative agenda (RULE, 2004). [47]

In my ongoing research and in my continued unfolding as a professional, I hope to facilitate spaces that will enable others to tell and share stories through which they are, in turn, able to move in directions of their own choosing. As social constructionism calls for a "radical pluralism" which is open to many truths and respect for all others regardless of their traditions; the challenge then becomes not to find "the one best way" but to facilitate the building of collaborative relationships for working together towards a better future (GERGEN & GERGEN, 2004, pp.20-21). This is further advocated by PILLAY (2009) who believes that the discovery of the "self" is of great social value, "because it is not a constructed identity that lives within the shadow of fear" and that "the challenge is to discover for ourselves the movement of action that is not about 'me' but about 'us'" (p.233). As the conversation unfolds, I cannot hide, I will move forward, I will not rust.

"in dark spaces

little moist

new life sprouts

in tangled mess

of life and death

the forest grows" [48]

## Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge my PhD supervisor, Prof. Yvonne SLIEP, who played an integral role in the writing of this article and shared in the reflexive and poetic dialogue.

## References

- Bandura, Albert (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2), 164-180.
- Bohm, David (1996). *On dialogue* (ed. by L. Nichol). London: Routledge.
- Brady, Ivan (2009). *Foreword in poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Butler-Kisber, Lynn & Poldma, Tiiu (2010). The power of visual approaches in qualitative inquiry: The use of collage making and concept mapping in experiential research. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(2), Art. M18, <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/197/196> [Accessed: May 5, 2015].
- Cunliffe, Ann L. (2008). Orientations to social constructionism: Relationally responsive social constructionism and its implications for knowledge and learning. *Management Learning*, 39(2), 123-139.
- Djuraskovic, Ivana & Arthur, Nancy (2011). Heuristic inquiry: A personal journey of acculturation and identity reconstruction. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(6), 1569-1593, <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-6/djuraskovic.pdf> [Accessed: October 17, 2016].
- [Ellis, Carolyn](#); Adams, Tony E. & Bochner, Arthur P. (2010). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108> [Accessed: July 24, 2015].
- Gallardo, Heather L.; Furman, Rich & Kulkarni, Shanti (2009). Explorations of depression: Poetry and narrative in autoethnographic qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 8(3), 287-304.
- [Gergen, Kenneth J.](#) (2009). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. & [Gergen, Mary](#) (2004). *Social construction: Entering the dialogue*. Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute Publications.
- Gilbert, Andy & Sliep, Yvonne (2009). Reflexivity in the practice of social action: From self-to inter-relational reflexivity. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 39(4), 468-479.
- Gilligan, Carol (2015). The listening guide method of psychological inquiry. *Qualitative Psychology*, 2(1), 69-77.
- Hiles, David R. (2013). Heuristic inquiry. In Lisa M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp.390-393). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jones, Stacy H. (2005). Autoethnography: Making the personal political. In [Norman K. Denzin](#) & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp.763-791). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Koelsch, Lori E. (2015). I poems: Evoking self. *Qualitative Psychology*, 2(1), 96-107.
- McIlveen, Peter (2008). Autoethnography as a method for reflexive research and practice in vocational psychology. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 17(2), 13-20.
- Moustakas, Clark E. (1972). *Loneliness and love*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Moustakas, Clark E. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Nuttall, John (2006). Researching psychotherapy integration: A heuristic approach. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 19(4), 429-444.
- Pathak, Archana A. (2010). Opening my voice, claiming my space: Theorizing the possibilities of postcolonial approaches to autoethnography. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(1), Art. M10, <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/231/191> [Accessed: October 17, 2016].

Pillay, Kriben (2009). From self-study to self-inquiry: Fictional history and the field of discovery. In Kathleen Pithouse, Claudia Mitchell & Relebohile Moletsane (Eds.), *Making connections: Self-study and social action* (pp.223-234). New York: Peter Lang.

Richardson, Laurel (1993). Poetics, dramatics, and transgressive validity: The case of the skipped line. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34(4), 695-710.

Rogers, Natalie (1993). *The creative connection: Expressive arts as healing*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behaviour Books.

Rule, Peter (2004). Dialogic spaces: adult education projects and social engagement. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 23(4), 319-334.

Schuster, Anne & Coetzee, Erica (2014). *To the islands*. Cape Town: Tiber Tree Press.

Sliep, Yvonne (2010). Teaching for transformation: The use of narrative metaphor to develop reflexive professionals. *Acta Academica, Supplementum 2*, 109-132, [http://scholar.ufs.ac.za:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11660/2777/academ\\_supp2\\_2010\\_a7.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://scholar.ufs.ac.za:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11660/2777/academ_supp2_2010_a7.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) [Accessed: October 20, 2016].

Sliep, Yvonne & Kotze, Elmarie (2007). Weaving a learning community by the telling, deconstructing and re-telling of life stories. In Kobus Marais (Ed.), *Shaping the story. A guide to facilitating narrative counselling* (pp.138-150). Pretoria: Van Schaiks.

Sliep, Yvonne & Norton, Lynn (2016). Trees, poems and drama to create reflexive spaces for peace building in schools. In Sylvester Mphahosa & Alphonse Keasley (Eds.), *Peace education for violence prevention in fragile African societies: What's going to make a difference?* (pp.243-274). Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa.

Suarez-Ortega, Magdalena (2013). Performance, reflexivity, and learning through biographical-narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(3), 189-200.

van Schalkwyk, Gertina, J. (2010). Collage life story elicitation technique: A representational technique for scaffolding autobiographical memories. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 675-695, <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-3/vanschalkwyk.pdf> [Accessed: October 17, 2016].

## Author

Lynn NORTON is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Psychology, Health Promotion, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The focus of her research is on the benefits of relational reflexivity and the use of life stories as methodology in education and community practice.

Contact:

Lynn Norton

University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Durban

4041

KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Tel: +27(83)7871477

E-mail: [lnorton@iafrica.com](mailto:lnorton@iafrica.com)

## Citation

Norton, Lynn (2017). Pathways of Reflection: Creating Voice Through Life Story and Dialogical Poetry [48 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 18(1), Art. 9, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs170192>.

## CHAPTER 4

### STORY OF EDUCATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter involves the consideration of critical reflexivity in an educational context, specifically health education and communication, with three articles focusing on different aspects of the research. All three papers are centred on the effects and benefits of reflexive, narrative work done during the PP module, with HP masters students from UKZN over a number of years. The PP module, was developed and facilitated by my academic supervisor (Professor Yvonne Sliep) initially in 2003 and has evolved over time. The PP module involves working with diverse learners from different provinces and countries and from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. It has been developed over time but central to the module is that learners are invited to prepare and share their life stories within a group using a tree of life metaphor which is revisited and deconstructed throughout the course. Learners add to and analyse their stories with the group through various experiential exercises to show how certain themes emerge and get richer over time. Using the CR model as a basis for developing critical reflexivity around storytelling, the learners analyse the dominant discourses that impact their lives to show how power is played out, and to highlight the links between a learner's personal context (including their values and identity) and their professional lives. The life stories have proved diverse and multi-layered giving different perspectives on, for example, gender, race, privilege and transition. Close tracking is then done throughout the course to show how “the personal emerges in professional choices and actions” (Sliep 2010, p. 122). Work is also done on personal portfolios using future timelines and attention is paid to developing the identity of students as lifelong learners (Sliep, 2010; Sliep & Kotze, 2007). The PP module proved an ideal point of departure for analysing and evaluating the development and practice of reflexivity in action. Aspects specifically considered related to the story telling process itself, reflexive gains or understandings, the transformative impact of these, and developments with particular regard to agency and performativity. The papers in this chapter focus on the following aspects:

Paper 2 (‘A critical reflexive model: Working with life stories in Health Promotion Education’) explores the value of using the CR Model with a group of students from the HP master's class who were involved in the PP module in 2016. This paper focuses specifically on the CR Model in action and offers an illustrative view of each of the aspects of the model and student experiences in relation to each.

Paper 3 (‘The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education’) focuses more specifically on the methods of analysis and the narrative, dialogical approach taken throughout the research in relation to an in-depth case study. The paper documents, through poetic inquiry, the life story of a refugee student in exile from Eritrea who was part of the HP masters class in 2014.

Paper 4 ('Hindsight and foresight for better insight') takes a more long term view to explore whether critical reflexivity has a lasting impact on the personal and professional lives of students over a period of time. The experiences of ten students who were part of the PP module and graduated at various times over a 12 year period were explored at a reflexive data gathering workshop during 2016.

#### **4.2 Exploring the value of using a critical reflexive model in health education**

**Paper 2:** Norton & Sliep: A critical reflexive model: Working with life stories in Health Promotion Education

## **A critical reflexive model:**

### **Working with life stories in Health Promotion Education**

**Lynn Norton & Yvonne Sliep**

#### **Abstract**

In this paper a critical reflexive model is described and applied to life stories of tertiary education students doing a masters in health promotion. At the heart of the process is the dialogical space where relational reflexivity is facilitated and around which the narrative story is developed. Examples from tertiary education are given to illustrate how working reflexively with life stories increases critical thinking and a sense of identity, belonging and agency. The approach is holistic in that it connects new knowledge to lived experience. It is based on a social constructionist worldview that uses a narrative lens which recognises that our knowledge is continuously constructed in context and in interaction with others. One way to understand ourselves and others is to understand our own and each other's stories. The model which facilitates this process involves four iterative loops: deconstructing power in the collective; mapping values and identity; negotiating agency; and rendering accountable performance.

**Key words:** Life stories, critical reflexivity, narrative, dialogical space, identity, belonging, agency

#### **Introduction**

This paper explores the value of working from a narrative reflexive perspective in health promotion education and more widely to bridge the gaps in education between theory and practice, academics and community involvement. A critical reflexivity model is interrogated as a methodology and tool for connecting students to their lived experience and their social and historical context. This is done through using life stories to connect personal discourses to dominant societal discourses to better understand the power at play in our society. Telling and deconstructing our stories leads us to a better understanding of how we position ourselves in society in terms of our values and identity. It also facilitates a process of reflexivity that enables us to then question our positioning within our contexts leading to agency and action. Witnessing the stories of others leads us to a better understanding of the relational ties that bind us together. In this way collective agency and social performativity are enabled.

We look first at the concept of reflexivity and how this is viewed in terms of a framework developed over time to facilitate reflexive skills in education and then link this to a narrative approach. Using life stories in education paves the way for students to develop deeper insights into their own learning processes and goals, and to play a more active role in shaping their own contexts in which they live, study and ultimately work (Sliep 2010). The overall approach is then explored through the voices of students who have been involved in the Personal is the Professional module which is part of the Health Promotion and Communication Master's at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). This module was developed by the second author specifically to create a learning space for students to collectively construct and deconstruct their social and educational worlds through the sharing of life stories.



## **Critical reflexivity**

The terms “reflective” and “reflexive” are used in various ways throughout the literature and across various disciplines (and sometimes interchangeably) (Fook, White and Gardner 2006; Gilbert and Sliep 2009). However, this paper intends to define the terms specifically for the purpose of providing a working definition for use as a basis of a conceptual framework aimed at developing critical reflexivity. Reflectivity is generally viewed as a process in terms of which a researcher pays attention to the self as a constructed object, taking into account their social context and their effect on their research (Gilbert and Sliep 2009). Reflexivity, however, goes further than reflectivity in the sense that it is both an approach to research and a way in which one can learn from practice – an educational tool that aids in critical knowledge production (Fook, White and Gardner 2006, 18). While reflection on its own aids recognition and awareness, this is not viewed as sufficient. We also need to take into account our embodied transactions, do our beliefs match our actions and our actions our beliefs? (Door 2014). A reflective researcher may become aware of their positioning but still act through that same lens or specific logic. The reflexive practitioner is more able to move beyond their own philosophical positioning and becomes open to multiple standpoints (Gergen 1999; Gilbert and Sliep 2009). Door (2014) argues that our actions and responses to others should be in alignment with our advocated ethical stance. Reflexivity then extends reflection and “includes the embodied self and its response to the other selves with whom that self interacts, and ...incorporates thoughtful action in the moment” (Door 2014, 91).

Of significance to this paper is a definition of reflexivity as an ongoing critical appraisal of self and others in action; understanding how our actions are formed by our context and our relationships to others (Gilbert and Sliep 2009). In relation to self-reflexivity this involves understanding how we position ourselves and how our positioning is affected by dominant discourses. In acknowledging reflexivity as a relational process it is viewed as occurring in

context, as dynamic and iterative, influenced by our past and present social interaction with others and how we position ourselves in relationships (Gilbert and Sliep 2009).

Understanding how we are influenced by the discourses in our lives and becoming aware of and acknowledging the norms and values we and others around us ascribe to means that we can better position ourselves to start living our preferred story. Fook, White and Gardner (2006, 18) argue that “a reflexive ability is central to critical reflection, in that an awareness of the influence of self and subjectivity is vital to an appreciation of how we construct and participate in constructing our world and our knowledge about the world”. Reflexivity then can be viewed as an interactive and empowering process that facilitates an understanding of how we can better live together, communally, in our world.

Individual, collective and social action all involve a complex network of interlinking relationships that need to be understood in context and in terms of space and time. We are who we are because of our social interactions over time with others in our past and present. Understanding who we are and how we view our world and are shaped by the world around us is part of a reflexive process. Such a process demands an examination of our own and other’s historical, political and cultural assumptions and intentions so that we may better understand both ourselves and each other (Gilbert and Sliep 2009; Sliep and Norton 2016).

Gergen (1999) sees this as the capacity to look beyond our own “obvious” realities so that we are able to listen to alternative representations held by others.

*reflexivity*

*is the ability*

*to question yourself*

*as you question others*

*to see multi-dimensionally*

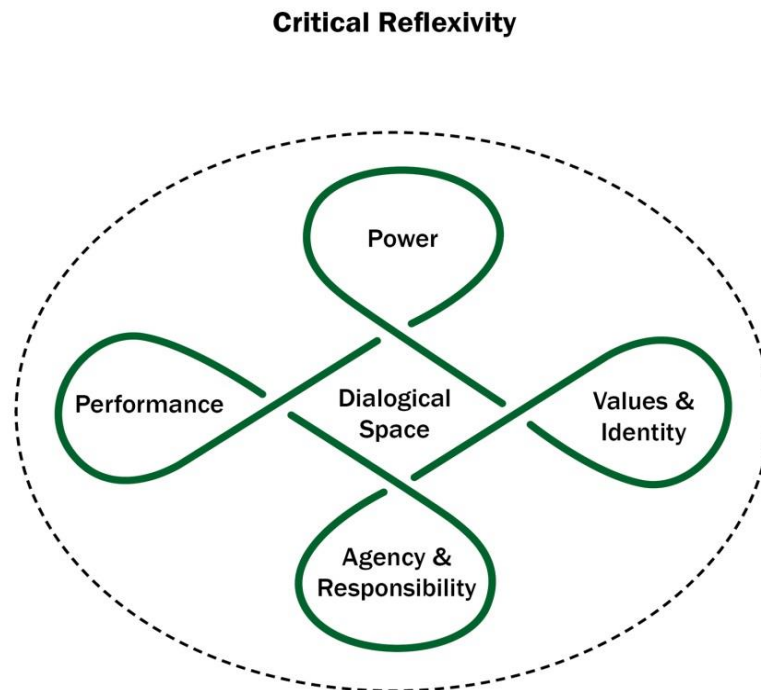
*to become we*

*[Poem extract: Sliep and Norton 2016]*

### **The process of reflexivity: Development of a conceptual model**

The process of reflexivity as described above was initially conceptualised by Sliep and Gilbert (2006) and has been refined over time resulting in the development of a critical reflexive model (Gilbert and Sliep 2009; Sliep 2016; Sliep and Norton 2016). The model has evolved to take into account multi-disciplinary and multi-level applications where context and relationship are of paramount importance. It is based on social constructionist principles in terms of which “reality” as we know it is constructed or brought into being through social action (Holstein and Gubrium 2011, 341). In a relational sense, this means that we create our understandings with others around us, through relationships, dialogue and interactions (Cunliffe 2008). As stated above, reflexivity is viewed as a process that is both dynamic and iterative. It is an ongoing practice of testing our assumptions and intentions that takes into account how our actions are influenced by our context and how our context is, in turn, influenced by our actions. When we understand that we create meaning and a sense of self in relation to others in our contexts, reflexivity becomes a morally responsible activity as we begin to test our assumptions and intentions so that we can interact with others more ethically (Cunliffe 2008). Gergen (1996) views us as performing in relationship, which enables us to engage more meaningfully with how and why we act in certain ways and how we position ourselves within society. In terms of the model our meaning making involves moving back and forth through four loops as part of a process of generating critical reflexivity and social and relational understanding as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Critical Reflexivity Framework** (Sliep and Gilbert 2009; Sliep 2016; Sliep and Norton 2016)



Moving through the loops involves deconstructing discourses on a societal level as well as exploring the mechanisms of power in your personal life; an awareness of your values and identity leading to an interrogation of responsibility and agency which, in turn, engenders social performativity. At the centre of the loops and the heart of the process is a dialogical space that facilitates a process of dialogue that enables one to understand that there are many truths and that what one person perceives as reality may not be so for another (Bohm 1996). A safe space is facilitated to support such understandings and the dialogue that is encouraged is linked to a socially transformative agenda involving a commitment to engage with and learn from each other (Rule 2004).

The critical reflexive model has been usefully applied in various contexts including higher education (Sliep and Kotze 2007); qualitative research (Naidu and Sliep 2011); school projects (Sliep and Norton 2016); and a variety of community projects (Sliep 2003; Sliep and Gilbert 2006). The model can be used in different circumstances to increase self and other awareness, improve social understanding and contextual perception through a better understanding of the power dynamics at play, more attentiveness to values and identity, linking agency to moral responsibility, and social rather than more limited individual transformative performance. It can be used as a research and practice approach; as a tool for analysing social issues and improving social cohesion; and for engendering reflexive skills in individuals or groups. Additionally, by applying a narrative approach to the framework a clear link is made to the importance of context, culture and community.

### **Sharing stories: Using Narrative to facilitate reflexivity**

How we interpret our lives is important. Narratives help us to find meaning in our lives and as part of a relational process help us to move towards not only a preferred story about the self but towards a collectively coherent story. A narrative approach based on constructionist principles helps us understand our cultural heritage and our context, how they shape us and how we understand ourselves and others. Recognising that knowledge is constructed communally opens a space for understanding our lives and those of others through examining our lived experiences and connecting these to the complexities of our society. The apparent contradictions and divisions in narrative inquiry between the idea of a singular subject learning from experience through their stories, and those stories as socially constructed and open to multiple interpretations has been highlighted in the narrative literature and are not discounted (Tamboukou, Andrews and Squires 2013). Many researchers, however, resolve to

work with the inconsistencies and bring them together in their quest to treat narratives as emancipatory or “modes of resistance” to prevailing power structures (Tamboukou, Andrews and Squires 2013). This is important in applying a narrative approach to reflexivity which involves using stories to help people change their social situations (Tamboukou, Andrews and Squires 2013; Sliep, Weingarten and Gilbert 2004). Stories in this sense, as in socio-narratology, are viewed as “actors” and the focus is in what stories “do”, rather than using stories to attempt to understand the mind of the single storyteller (Frank 2010, 13). We view the term “experience” here as not something that is uncontested or a taken for granted “truth” reflecting an individual’s past but rather as a political “event” and something that in Scott’s (1992, 38) words is “that which we want to explain”. It is not the particular content of the stories or the expressed experience that is important, but that the narrative reflexive process facilitates an ability to question that content, experience, or event and to look at it in different ways. Telling stories and witnessing those of others around us enables us to look more widely, to see and experience multiple viewpoints. Deconstructing our stories helps us to understand the lens through which we view the world and opens us to a better understanding of how other viewpoints are constructed through different story lines. We are then in a better position to understand and value others.

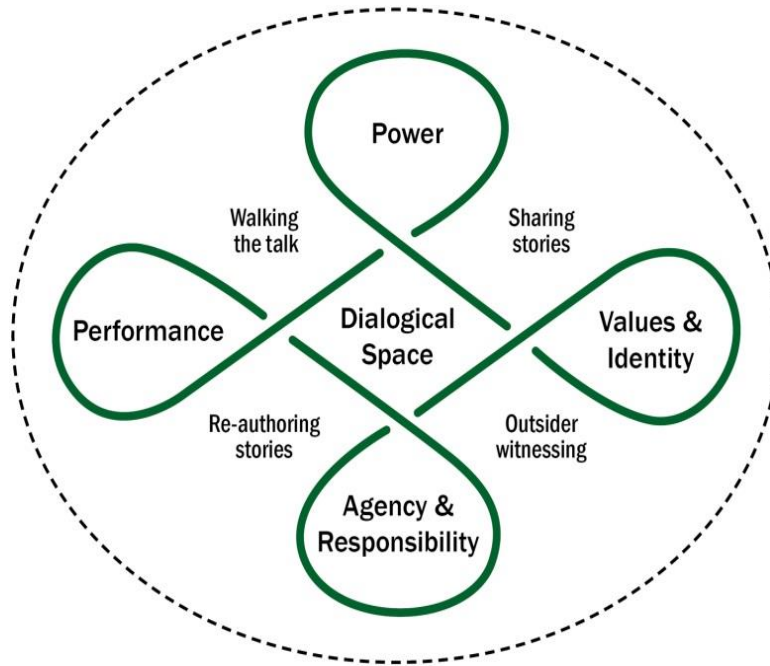
The characteristics and benefits of a life-history/narrative investigation have been summed up by Suarez-Ortega (2013) and include: prioritising participants’ subjective consciousness (meaning is constructed so can be re-authored); a focus on culture and context highlights the collective nature of story-telling; and both micro aspects which are directly a part of the storytellers’ lives, and macro aspects involving the larger cultural, social, political and economic context come into play. These open the way for the development of reflexive knowledge through a holistic approach, linking the individual to the community and to larger societal and historical aspects. We need to listen to each other’s stories, to understand that we

operate from different realities but that it is still possible to shape new stories collectively. Creating shared meaning together can lead to positive social outcomes. This does not happen on its own but requires both self and relational reflexivity and nuanced social understanding, as part of the storied process.

When the critical reflexive model is used in conjunction with a narrative methodology the process of reflexivity is enhanced through the telling and witnessing of life stories. Telling and deconstructing your story enables you to recognise and break down the influence of dominant discourses in your life. Examining your values and identity through your own story allows you to then position yourself in your story which, in turn, moves you to a place of agency and responsibility. In the fourth loop, you move towards living your preferred story. When this takes place in the presence of others, it is in witnessing their stories that you are better able to understand their realities and move together towards a preferred collective story in which everyone is important; rather than being limited by individualistic outcomes. This process is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Narrative paradigm in reflexivity framework** (Sliep 2016; Sliep and Norton 2016)

**Narrative paradigm in reflexivity framework**



A narrative life story approach that is reflexive in nature takes place in an interpretive framework and is grounded in principles of Critical Communicative Methodology (CCM) (Suarez-Ortega 2013). CCM stems from a belief that all people have the ability to analyse their own reality and the right to offer arguments and to do so using their own language (Suarez-Ortega 2013). When stories are explored within a reflexive framework participants are invited, through examining their own story, to recognise the power at play within dominant discourses that can then be challenged. This opens the way for the structuring of a new story and the development of both agency and a critical consciousness. Although there are challenges to the legitimacy of life history methodologies, they have become increasingly



popular (Dhunpath 2000). Dhunpath (2000, 544 – 545) suggests that such an approach is “probably the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the postmodern world” and coins the term “narradigm” to support the reality that our lives and the way we experience our world are narrative in quality.

### **Narrative reflexivity in education and health promotion**

Prior research indicates that transformation in education is considered as more than just adding to learners’ skills and knowledge base. It is rather viewed as an “ongoing change in the way educators and students approach the acquisition of knowledge and skills and relate them to a broader context” (Waghid 2002, 459). Such transformative teaching and learning is considered to connect “new knowledge with lived experience, resulting in an on-going construction and reconstruction of personal, professional and contextual narratives” (Sliep 2010, 109). With a recognition that knowledge is co-constructed (Gergen 2009), the path is opened for students to participate more actively in their own learning. Facilitating reflexive skills and critical thinking through sharing and deconstructing life stories means that there is a privileging of context and community rather than the more individualistic approaches of Western society; more attention is paid to the rich contributions of indigenous knowledge systems through personal storytelling; and the voices of students become part of the co-construction of knowledge. Stories are also viewed more practically in education as ideal vehicles for students to make learning meaningful, to retain concepts, to make better sense out of their observations, and to develop multiple perspectives rather than being stuck in the belief that their own views are the only and correct ones (Morgan and Dennehy 2004).

In relation to teaching and learning, “[r]aising critical consciousness involves a significant learning experience with a real world context” (Mangadu 2014, 11). This means that learning experiences only reach significance when they go beyond subject content and allow for the application of knowledge in real world contexts. Critical thinking and consciousness, through reflexive learning are therefore the cornerstones for becoming independent and active learners (Mangadu 2014). Gergen (2009) stresses the importance of viewing education not as a process of individual success or failure but believes its overall aim should be to increase individual and group potentials for participating in both local and global relational processes. Effective education should then consider the productive participation of individuals in family, community and other social and political structures, and thereby foster “processes that indefinitely extend the potentials of relationship” (Gergen 2009, 243). This can only be achieved through participatory forms of inclusion, taking into account the lived-in contexts of learners in order to “bring multiple worlds into coordination, and to replace divisive hierarchies with mutual appreciation” (Gergen 2009, 255). As such, all education but particularly education that is aimed at developing professionals who will serve society such as health promotion professionals, requires that we favour a deeper understanding of context. This is possible through dialogical and reflexive practice.

Reflexivity is made possible through working with individual and group personal experiences, life stories and through dialogue. In an educational setting, it is in the telling of personal life stories that educators and learners begin to work with the “lived experiences” of learners, contextualising them and enabling an exploration of the complexities of society. In this way personal discourses of learners are linked to their professional lives. Life stories connect new knowledge to personal context and through this students’ understandings of the learning process are improved and can then serve as a guide for future learning. The critical

reflexive model enables learners to critically reflect on meaning in both their own lives and the lives of others, and thus provides a “map to show where agency is played out” as learning and application are integrated (Sliep 2010, 115).

More generally, stories are viewed as tools for living that enables one to reflect and therefore to better understand, negotiate and create; leading to potential transformation on both a personal and social level (Suarez-Ortega 2013). In terms of an ecological view of agency, life-narratives are believed to be an important vehicle for the realisation of agency in one’s life as something that is not merely possessed but achieved when individuals actively engage in understanding their actions within their own contexts (Biesta and Tedder 2007). In the construction of meaning within a life context there is an acknowledgement of voice, and the right to be heard, which is especially important for those who have been or are socially excluded (Suarez-Ortega 2013).

**Table 1: Life stories and reflexivity:** Adapted from Sliep (2010)

<p><b>LIFE STORIES/ Narrative Biographical Method</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telling your life history (as storyteller)</li> <li>• Telling your story to others (being witnessed)</li> <li>• Telling your story amidst others (as witness)</li> <li>• Deconstructing and re-telling</li> <li>• Discovering critical learning incidences</li> <li>• Exploring current life challenges and aspirations</li> <li>• Shaping preferred future outcomes</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p><b>Developing contextual narratives</b></p>	<p><b>Self + Relational – reflexivity</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">↕</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical consciousness</li> <li>• Contextual savvy</li> <li>• Increased agency</li> <li>• Social performativity</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p><b>Connecting Lived Experience + New Knowledge</b></p>
--	---

Additionally, the impact of sharing life stories following a reflexive process means that:

- Narrators get a stronger sense of who they are by looking more closely at their life's journey – their history, discoveries and current life circumstances.
- A greater sense of validation is created - their stories do matter, where they come from and what they have lived through all matter and make them who they are today.
- Narrators are better able to value the knowledge that they have developed over time through life experience.

Through sharing and speaking out, the value of your own knowledge and experience is anchored. In narrative theory outsider witnessing leads to your position being affirmed by others. Further, when your voice is heard you are no longer invisible, but “seen” for who you are. In turn you are able to “see” yourself and embrace your culture and who you are, without having to hold onto negative aspects that have challenged you. During this process your identity and sense of belonging is affirmed. Students can start to understand that their voice is important and that their opinions matter, enabling a sense of agency. However, it is important to understand that these forms of affirmation do not always happen and are not automatic, but need to be carefully facilitated. These processes can work well in small groups where stories are shared and only when an atmosphere of trust, respect and being non-judgmental has been built in the dialogical space.

### **Dialoguing with theory and method: Student experiences of narrative reflexivity**

We now explore the model in practice; following a participative approach with a group of eleven Health Promotion masters' students from UKZN who have shared their life stories in the Personal is the Professional module during 2016. This group forms part of a larger

research project that explores the benefits and effects of reflexivity and life stories in tertiary education over a fifteen year period. The material offered below is used with the consent of and in reflexive dialogue with the students. It is used illustratively in this paper rather than as a body of research data to show their experience of developing reflexivity through sharing and deconstructing their stories focussing on each aspect of the model. Students taking the module are invited to undertake a reflexive exploration of their histories (through life stories), lived experience (critical learning incidents), current life challenges, and aspirations. These are explored through a number of experiential exercises, for example, developing a tree of life, writing your story in the third person, reflecting on other student's questions and on how each loop of the critical reflexive model (power, values and identity, agency, and performance) impacts their understandings and insights. Working in this way involves a critical examination of intersectionality and the positioning of individuals both physically and through discourse, with students being encouraged to move from theory to practice and back from practice to theory.

Using the words of students, we now construct an illustrative overview of their experience of critical reflexivity.

*Hearing other people's experience made me realise and appreciate how unique everybody is but at the same time how some things or experiences are common across different cultures, origins and people.*

### ***Dialogical space***

At the core of reflexivity is the dialogical space, a safe place that is specifically facilitated by the educator to make it possible to tell your story and undertake the reflexive exploration that is asked of the students. It is a facilitated space of trust that encourages dialogical interaction and an examination of students' pictures of reality, to understand, by listening to others, that

these pictures are constructed truths and may not hold true for everyone. Although also a physical space, when it is filled with stories told within a trusting environment, it becomes possible to open up to multiple, alternative viewpoints. Such a space requires certain conditions to be in place for the process of reflexivity to “work.” A culture of “critical acceptance” is considered essential in the creation of a climate of respect where it is safe to question old viewpoints and to try new ideas (Fook, White and Gardner 2006, 16). People are encouraged to be open, non-judgemental and dialogue is stimulated. Communal dialogue in itself is viewed as having the potential to “create a space for cultural exchange that draws on language and social representations” (Skovdal and Abebe 2012, 80). In such a space teachers and students come together as equals and are valued not in terms of their positions of power (although power inequalities and tensions are not ignored) but rather for their intrinsic relevance and value (Skovdal and Abebe 2012). This student’s reflection reveals her experience of the space created:

*I feel so safe and secure and I can safely say I have found a home away from home. I can safely share my experiences and it’s so amazing how I managed to speak about some personal stuff that I had never found the space and courage to talk about.*

Using words taken directly from the life story and reflections of one of the students the following poem was created to illustrate the response of the student to being in a safe dialogical space that allows someone to be heard in their “wholeness,” to bring all of him and his experiences into the space:

*Finding dialogical space*

*corridors of gray closed doors  
uninviting clinical disarray*

*functional space, sensible*

*and academic*

*I am shy and nervous*

*sitting upright*

*and exposed*

*I will only say what I think*

*they want to hear*

*I used to sit*

*in back rows uncertain*

*alien and uninvited*

*no one knows*

*where I came from*

*no one knows*

*my family, my history*

*the mountains*

*where I herded goats*

*no one knows*

*of the time*

*I spent hiding*

*in the forest*

*because I couldn't pay*

*for my school uniform*

*no one knows*

*where my strength*

*comes from  
of the mountains  
where I prayed  
no one knows  
no one asked*

*until today  
in this small gray  
room with broken  
air conditioners  
I'm sitting now  
bent forward  
in a tight-knit group  
we build a nest  
for an unexpected egg  
bought in from home  
collect pieces of nature  
from the world outside  
this never happened before  
in this institution  
a banking system  
now I am touching life  
for the first time  
since I walked down  
these corridors*



*of gray closed doors*

*today I was asked*

*to tell my story*

*bring in my past*

*to bring the mountains*

*and the goats*

*my father's early death*

*into this room*

*I have been asked*

*to bring myself*

*into this room*

*at the end of the corridor*

*of closed gray doors*

*I am invited to speak*

*and I will tell you*

*the truth*

## **Power**

Students are encouraged to critically examine the operations of power in their lives on as personal, structural and political level. They are required to look at their own story within the dominant story and to see who holds power and why, and to attempt to make sense of how current dominant discourses impact how they position themselves. This is more about understanding power than trying to dismantle it; and through understanding, to shift and move their own perspectives around power. Recognising the constraints and in some cases

the advantages of personal, social, and political power, students highlight examples from their life stories:

*Personal: It is my personal power in self-belief that has kept me up to this far...to my postgraduate studies. This has happened despite my poor family background which did not deter my ambitions or goals of furthering my studies.*

*Family: In my culture power resides with one's parents.... "you are always a child in the eyes of your parents", this phrase has been used by my parents especially my mother who believes that the parent is always right because of her age and years of experience.....Because of the power she had over me (financial, emotional and social) I could not do anything to stop the abuse.*

*Social: My culture dictates that Indian women have to fulfil multiple roles such as wife, daughter, chef, maid, student, daughter-in-law and mother. These roles take priority over my education... have to be fulfilled to be considered a good Indian woman. The inability to meet these requirements results in your family name being lowered or losing value and power in society...my choices are limited by my family, cultural and societal context.*

*Political: Because I am a Zimbabwean... the government sets boundaries on how I can live my life here in South Africa as a foreigner.*

Deconstructing the webs of power surrounding the self and community leads to a questioning of identity and values. Who am I within this context? Who are we within this context?

### ***Values and Identity***

In telling their stories individual students are invited to examine their own values and identity and where these stem from. Values are not based on or examined in terms of some universal

principal but rather in terms of collective negotiation and communal participation. In relation to the group, social thinking is facilitated to work towards recognition of different views and interaction between each other that is for the collective benefit. Using an experiential poetry exercise for students to reveal their values amidst their life stories, one student wrote the following poem which she said she “*didn’t know*” she was going to write. Reading the poem aloud to her fellow students was a very moving experience, creating space for her own and others further reflection. The poem reveals a core value relating to forgiveness in the life story of the student and aligns with the role that forgiveness has played in South Africa through the Truth and Reconciliation process which started 20 years ago:

*My father was killed*

*Why my father?*

*Nobody was arrested*

*Lack of knowledge*

*Why my father?*

*Nobody was willing to help my parents*

*Lack of knowledge of my parents*

*I forgive those who killed my father*

*Nobody was willing to help my parents*

*I have forgiven them already*

*I forgive those who killed my father*

*I want to be a good example to my siblings*

*I have forgiven them already*

*Nobody was arrested*

*I want to be a good example*

*My father was killed*

Further examples and close scrutiny of students' values also revealed that there is not always an alignment between individual and cultural values and this can create a discord which requires some negotiation. For example, a female student from Zimbabwe says:

*Wearing of trousers is considered to be inappropriate and an insult to the Shona cultural values...but....*

*The way I dress does not define my character...but...*

*I would prefer to align to the cultural values around dressing whenever I visit my rural home as a way of respecting my elders.*

These examples show the need for a nuanced understanding of agency, moral responsibility and the need to negotiate your position within a community or societal context.

***Agency and responsibility***

Opening a space for students to tell their stories, to be self-reflective and to become more self-aware helps to increase a sense of agency. Bandura (2001) views agency as emergent and people as having the ability to make choices and to take action. He stresses the importance of efficacy, beliefs, and a sense of control as foundations to personal agency and a major influence on personal development. Storytelling encourages coherence, sense of control and meaning, and in this way stimulates a sense of positive agency. Where this is done within a safe, dialogic space all views are heard, including marginalised voices. Further, different modes of agency are recognised including individual, proxy and collective agency (Bandura 2001), all of which may be encouraged as different forms that may be more supportive depending on the relevant circumstances. A student from Burundi highlights understandings that lead her towards agency:

*There are many intersecting or interlocking dominant discourses that are prevalent in my life that resulted in the oppression and discrimination of myself, my parents and foreign nationals such as age, nationality, class, gender and religion. These intersecting categories have all collectively helped me shape and understand my personal as well as collective agency.*

### ***Accountable performance***

Performance requires living the preferred story, putting words into accountable action, or *walking the talk* (Sliep and Norton 2016). Students need to consider the issues that have arisen and work out how they can be dealt with in alignment to their values, identity, and in terms of moral and collective responsibility. Performativity in relation to inter-relational reflexivity means that people need to examine the way they speak and act in relation to others; to understand and acknowledge how they and others are positioned in terms of dominant discourses; to be transparent about their positioning; and to advance social action that is beneficial to all involved. Performing reflexively therefore requires action that is accountable and informed by the bigger picture, one that takes both context and the overall reflexive process in account. What is required is a “pulling together” of all the loops which results in actions and decisions which are based on:

- an understanding of context and culture;
- an awareness of power – personal, social and political – in respect of all stakeholders;
- consideration of own and others values and identity;
- moral agency for positive performativity; and
- a commitment to dialogue, negotiated positions and actions.

Further, it is important that this moves from a mere academic exercise into external practice.

Are your personal values reflected in your professional life? Social and power differences

should be made visible, marginalised voices should be heard, oppressive discourses should be challenged and care should be taken with how language is used. It is only in this way that it becomes possible to move towards just and equitable practices or positive social performativity.

*I am becoming more accommodating of opposing views, different religions, and cultural practices. Personally I have become more interested in people and believe everyone has a story and has enriching experiences that have shaped them. My way of life or faith is not the only absolute way.*

*This is what I believe is the concept of “walking the talk”, where I am actively doing something (studying health promotion) to help me in my future goals of becoming an advocate for marginalised women, children and victims of conflict situations.*

The above reflections clearly illustrate why reflexivity is important in health promotion work. As a health promotion professional it is important to listen to others stories without judgement and to see the whole person and their context.

### **Transforming Perspectives: From reflexive students to reflexive professionals**

What is important in terms of reflexivity and accountable performativity in education is to equip students for their future professional lives with the capability of being reflexive – facilitating the development of a skill that supports critical thinking and critical consciousness. What is required is a shift in perspective, a new way of thinking that is emancipatory and transformative. Critical consciousness has been described as a process involving continual reflection on and examination of our own assumptions, biases, and the way we perceive our worlds (Sakamoto and Pitner 2005). When critical consciousness is “embedded in action” through a reflexive process it signifies a shift or movement, a change in the *status quo* (Gilbert and Slied 2009, 473). In this way reflexivity becomes a tool for

interrogation, change and transformation. Reflexivity used alongside story telling means that these shifts take place within a particular context, culture and community. These shifts are grounded in lived experience and can take root precisely for this reason. Our culture, history and community are acknowledged as part of our world view. Their role is not diminished but rather scrutinised, enabling the development of a more authentic but critical lens through which to interpret our world, make decisions, and take action.

The reflexive process that begins with the narration of your life story can be viewed as a journey, one that is not always easy. A road not straight, but crooked and rutted. You find yourself going back and forth from the personal to the theoretical and back to the personal, seeking connections and asking questions. The process is both challenging and uncomfortable. At times you become lost and experience a sense of disorientation – you continually question your position, and this is part of the process. It is only once you have gone full circle, reflected on all aspects (power, values and identity, agency and responsibility, and accountable performativity) that the dots become visible and you start to join them together. In this way it becomes possible to link your own life experience to theory and begin to understand theory in terms of your own context. Theoretical understanding becomes grounded through this process and only then does it become possible for you to tie the fragments together and see the bigger picture. A reflexive journey or process is not automatic and although there may be various ways to travel, working with an established methodological framework can aid and quicken the process. It is through this exploration that essential connections are made between: self and other; theory and practice; the personal and the professional. Journeying with others means that not only do individual stories start taking shape, but social identities can be reinforced and re-created.

The reflexive process is beneficial in steering a person forward towards accountable performativity. Once someone has “found” their voice, it is often the case that they feel very

proud of where they have come from and having come through the many struggles that they have endured. Instead of seeing these struggles as negatives, on reflection they are able to see their own strengths in having come through their challenges “against all odds.” Their own indigenous knowledge and experience becomes a point of reference, something to be valued and built upon. *I am who I am because of my past experience with others....*

*I had to drop out of school due to my family/parent’s financial obstacles...my brother and I spent the year looking after the home cattle and we used to leave home early in the morning to spend the entire day on the mountains with the cattle...this became our daily bread...I started developing a strong relation with God in the mountain as I used to pray a lot whenever I was in the field. This is the strength I still have now which keeps me connected to God.*

*I am determined to go for things that I have failed to achieve before because of the experiences I have shared this past week (during the module). I realised that all the challenges I have faced, someone has experienced them and passed through them. I was so much challenged and encouraged by other people who have made it against all odds.*

Having experienced this process in a directed manner and in a safe dialogical space, students are able to move from their own personal understanding to a position in their professional lives where they are able to work effectively and in partnership with others. A reflexive professional approach views others as experts in their own lives but in so doing acknowledges the complexities of this and understands that being your own expert has its own responsibility. Working in partnership entails acknowledging that person’s context and



background, that person's story and also facilitates space for a dialogue that supports informed decision-making. Once the student understands the reflexive process and its components in terms of their own lives; this can be used as an instrument for working with social issues and clients. This means showing an understanding that the same components are present in the life of the client and all need to be responded to in a holistic manner. For example, working with a mother of an undernourished child would require a stance that understands the context and poverty perspective in situations where there is a lack of access to food and resources rather than taking a blaming or expert stance.

*Having to listen to some people's sensitive stories has taught me to be sensitive and very attentive when dealing with people.*

Once these shifts have been made, it is no longer possible to go back, you see differently. We may well need reminding, and it is important for reflexive practice to become a part of who we are. However, it is hoped that after such an intensive reflexive process students would then take a different view within their professional lives, one that involves looking at the bigger picture, prioritising the relevance of context and acknowledging the value of connecting to lived experience. We need to know that each person has a story and that each story is important and relevant.

## References

- Bandura, A. 2001. Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective. *Annual Review Psychology*, 52:1-6.
- Biesta, G. and Tedder, M. 2007. Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective, *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(2): 132-149.
- Bohm, D. 1996. *On Dialogue*, Edited by Lee Nichol. London: Routledge.
- Cunliffe, A. 2008. Orientations to Social Constructionism: Relationally Responsive Social Constructionism and its Implications for Knowledge and Learning. *Management Learning*, 39(2): 123-139.
- Dhunpath, R. 2000. Life history methodology: “narradigm” regained. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(5): 543-551.
- Door, V. M. 2014. Critical Pedagogy and Reflexivity: The Issue of Ethical Consistency, *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 5(2): 88-99.
- Fook, J., White, S. and Gardner, F. 2006. Critical reflection: a review of contemporary literature and understandings. In S. White, J. Fook and F. Gardner (Eds), *Critical reflections in health and social care*, 3 – 20. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Frank, A.W. 2010. *Letting stories breath: A socio-narratology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gergen, K. J. 1996. Social Psychology as Social Construction: The Emerging Vision. For *The Message of Social Psychology: Perspectives on Mind in Society*. C. McGarty and A. Haslam. Eds. Oxford: Balckwell.

- Gergen, K. J. 1999. *An invitation to social construction*. London: Sage Publication.
- Gergen, K. J. 2009. *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press.
- Gilbert, A. and Sliep, Y. 2009. Reflexivity in the practice of social action: from self-to inter-relational reflexivity. *South African Journal of Psychology* 39(4): 468-479.
- Holstein, J. A. and Gubrium, J. F. 2011. The Constructionist Analytics of Interpretive Practice. In N.K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications,
- Mangadu, T. 2014. Empowering Health Promotion Students on the Texas-Mexico Border Through Digital Storytelling: Implications for Public Health in Vulnerable Communities. *TPHA Journal* 66(3).
- Morgan, S. and R. F. Dennehy. 2004. Using stories to reframe the social construction of reality: A trio of activities. *Journal of Management Education* 28(3), 372-389.
- Naidu, T. and Sliep, Y. 2011. Contextual Reflexivity: Towards Contextually Relevant Research with South African HIV/AIDS Home-Based Care Volunteers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 10(4): 431-443.
- Rule, P. 2004. Dialogic Spaces: Adult education projects and social engagements, *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 23(4): 319-334.
- Sakamoto, I. and Pitner, R. O. 2005. Use of Critical Consciousness in Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice: Disentangling Power Dynamics at Personal and Structural Levels, *British Journal of Social Work* 35: 435-452.
- Scott, J. W. 1992. Experience. In *Feminists Theorize the Political*. J. Butler and J. W. Scott. Eds. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.

- Skovdal, M. and Abebe, T. 2012. Reflexivity and Dialogue: Methodological and Socio-Ethical Dilemmas in Research with HIV-Affected Children in East Africa. *Ethics, Policy and Environment* 15(1): 77-96.
- Sliep, Y. 2003. Building Partnerships in responding to vulnerable children: A rural African community context. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* 2: 56-66.
- Sliep, Y. 2010. Teaching for transformation: the use of narrative metaphor to develop reflexive professionals. *Acta Academica: Teaching of psychology in South Africa: Supplementum 2*: 109-132.
- Sliep, Y. 2016. Poetry as dialogue: Navigating the storms. In Formenti, L. and West, L. (Eds) *Stories that make a difference: Exploring the collective, social and political potential of narratives in adult education research* (172-180). Italy: Pensa, MultiMedia.
- Sliep, Y. and Gilbert, A. 2006. Promoting Inter-Relational Reflexivity with Psychosocial Workers in Community Work: A Case Study from Burundi. *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 2: 293-302.
- Sliep, Y., and Kotze, E. 2007. Weaving a learning community by the telling, deconstructing and re-telling of life stories. In Kobus Maree (Ed.) *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*: 138-150. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Sliep, Y and Norton, L. 2016. Trees, poems and drama to create reflexive spaces for peace building in schools, in Sylvester Mphahosa & Alphonse Keasley (Eds.), *Peace education for violence prevention in fragile African societies: What's going to make a difference?* 243 – 274, Africa Institute of South Africa, Pretoria.

Sliep, Y., K. Weingarten and A. Gilbert. 2004. Narrative Theatre as an interactive community approach to mobilizing collective action in Northern Uganda. *Families, Systems and Health*. 22(3): 306-20.

Suarez-Ortega, M. 2013. Performance, Reflexivity, and Learning Through Biographical-Narrative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 19(3): 189-200.

Tamboukou, M, M. Andrews and C Squire. 2013. *Introduction: What is narrative research*. In *Doing Narrative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Andrews, M, Squire, C. and M. Tamboukou, eds, London: Sage Publications.

Waghid, Y. 2002. Knowledge production and higher education transformation in South Africa: Towards reflexivity in university teaching, research and community service. *Higher Education* 43(4): 457-488.

### **4.3 A case study highlighting research methodology**

**Paper 3:** Norton & Sliep – The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education

# **The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education**

**Lynn Norton & Yvonne Sliep**

**University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**

**Key words:** Life stories, reflexivity, narrative, poetic inquiry, dialogical, refugee experience

## **Introduction: Developing critical reflexivity through life stories**

*many parts of me*

*are somewhere far from me*

*loss of family is loss of life*

*knowing others suffer more*

*helps me to suffer less*

*my birth was a gift*

*I need to stay close*

*to where I want my future to be*

*telling the story*

*you see the chains*

*listening carefully*

*helps to set you free*

*the poetry unfolds me*

*I am painfully grateful*

These are the words of “A”, a student from the State of Eritrea now living in South Africa. In this article we explore the roads we have travelled with him in unearthing a research methodology to meaningfully explore his experience of sharing his story of exile. The

purpose of our research is to discover what happens when space is created in an educational setting for reflexivity through story-telling. We examine specifically the effects of critical reflexivity developed by students in the Health Promotion master's programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, of which "A" has been a part. Students are exposed to contextual learning through telling, witnessing and deconstructing life stories within a group using a tree of life metaphor. Their stories are examined throughout the semester as part of developing reflexivity and critical discourse analysis is used to deconstruct dominant discourses and to highlight links between personal context and professional lives (Sliep, 2010; Sliep & Kotze, 2007). We examine "A's" narrative and his experiences of the process as a case study. This has allowed us to immerse ourselves into "A's" story and to look for patterns in the context of his real life experiences (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011).

This case study forms part of a wider archaeological navigation to find a valid method of analysis for better understanding the transformative value of using life stories in education. The challenge when working with stories in research is to find ways not to fragment or sterilize participants' stories while maintaining a balance between the scientific and the creative. We use poetry as a way to stay close to and reveal "A's" story but consider it important, as in all research, to validate our methodology. We do this reflexively throughout the process, encouraging the reader to delve first into the theory so that we can then explore "A's" journey together with open eyes. We consider reflexivity here as an ability to understand more clearly how we position ourselves in our stories and how we co-construct meaning in community (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). It is viewed as a dynamic process, occurring in context and in relationship with others (Gergen, 2009). The value of reflexivity lies in allowing us (researcher, participant, audience) to question our truths and to "listen to



alternative framings of reality” (Gergen, 1999:13). In education more specifically, reflexivity is considered crucial for understanding power practices, developing critical consciousness, and enabling agency and accountable action (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009; Sliep, 2010). Supporting this process is the Critical Reflexive Model which is used both as a tool for developing and understanding reflexivity and, within a narrative approach, as a method for developing preferred stories. The model proposes an iterative process of moving back and forth through four loops within a dialogical space: deconstructing power and the effect of dominant discourses; determining values and identity; negotiating agency and responsibility; and facilitating accountable performance (Sliep, 2014; Sliep & Norton, 2016).

### **Doing the groundwork: A methodological exploration**

In our research we align with both constructivist and critical perspectives, in the belief that stories are co-constructed in interaction with others and that power should be shared between parties to research, but may shift during the process (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). The data collected for the case study were qualitative in nature and varied. It included “A’s” life story shared in the master’s class, various deconstruction exercises, interviews, open dialogues, and the researchers’ reflections. “A” was also part of a group of students who were invited to probe their experiences more deeply in a two day workshop through a number of experiential exercises including reflective writing in nature, cellphone images, collage work and poetry. Although there are many meaningful ways to analyse qualitative data, particular data opens itself to different forms of interpretation. Finding the right “fit” between the data collected and how it should be analysed becomes a subjective choice, but requires validation. We aim here to make this process visible through a practice of methodological reflexivity (Naidu & Sliep, 2011).

Early in our research we decided to follow a narrative approach as this fits well with storytelling and understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reissman, 2008). Further, narratives open us to the different layers of meaning that help us to better understand individual and social change (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013). This decision did not however make the research journey easier as there are a range of perspectives within the field and the specific methodology followed is not always clear (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). We needed to navigate the details, and had to do this in collaboration with the storyteller who was integral to the process. Forming a collaborative partnership brought with it an additional perspective – our approach was both narrative and dialogic.

### **Surveying the field: Dialoguing with narrative interpretation**

Despite the many approaches to narrative analysis, there appears general agreement that it is important to interact with the bigger story rather than looking for distinct themes in the data (Mishler, 1986; Reissman, 2008; Andrews et al., 2013). Narrative interpretation has been described as “*a way of looking at narrative data,*” that involves asking both *what* the story is about, and *why* that story has been told (Spector-Mersel, 2014: 2). Reissman (1993: 2) adds to this by asking, “why was the story told *that way*”. These different “ways of looking” are considered essential for a multilayered understanding of the data. Narrative inquiry then involves the “whole” experience of living, telling and retelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This fits well with a socio-narratology perspective which stresses the importance of dialogue and the need to work with the storyteller and listener/reader(s) with an “openness to multiple understandings” (Frank, 2010: 34).

In terms of a socio-narratology stories are viewed as “*actors*” with a focus on what the story *does* rather than attempting to understand the mind of the storyteller (Frank, 2010:13). Stories are active - in meaning-making, constructing identities, making connections, and encouraging change (Reissman, 2008). Underlying this understanding is a dialogical narrative practice of interpretation based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s belief that “no voice is ever singular” and all comprise multiple other voices (Frank, 2010:16). This requires a dialogical attitude towards interpretation in terms of Bakhtin’s principles: there is no one final meaning (“non-finalizability”); participants are experts in their own lives and should not be seen as subjects; and the researcher speaks *with* not *about* and has no claim to interpretative authority (Frank, 2010: 99 – 100). Dialogical narrative analysis then is not so much a method as a practice or heuristic guide to finding the best way to analyse your data (Frank, 2010). However, despite leaning away from standardized rules for validation in narrative research, issues of trustworthiness and visibility remain important and need to be guided by theory and ethical considerations (Reissman, 2008).

A dialogical approach ensures that the researcher engages with the participant rather than pronouncing on the story (Frank, 2010). It is significant as a method for establishing an *authentic* relationship between parties, joint engagement, and creative understanding (Rule, 2006). Following such an approach does not necessarily mean that “truth” will emerge but it does mean that the process is open and relational. It opens space for developing critical thought and is particularly relevant to our research which considers both the content of students’ life stories (what is the story about?), and the effect of sharing their story with the group (what does telling your story do?). We decided to follow a multi-layered approach, one based in narrative but including critical reflexivity and dialogue. We did not want to box

“A’s” story but to work collaboratively with him to allow his story to “breathe” (Frank, 2010). We needed to dig deeper still to create a map for this.

### **Developing a map: Matching method and data**

To initiate an understanding of the data, Frank (2010: 74) suggests a “practice of criticism that seeks movement of thought” by choosing a set of questions significant to the research as a basis for iterative dialogue between the story, the storyteller and the researchers. The Critical Reflexive Model offered us a guide to frame our questions which focused on power, values and identity, shifts in positioning, agency and performativity. We then turned to the Listening Guide as a way to stay close to the story without losing touch of the surrounding context. This is a multi-layered, qualitative, relational, interpretative approach developed by Brown and Gilligan (1992) and adapted in various ways by researchers in multi-disciplinary projects (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008; Gilligan, 2015; Woodcock, 2005). The guide is viewed as a way to work reflexively with subjects while paying close attention to the subjects’ “voice,” relationships and cultural context (Gilligan, 2015). This was useful for closely examining “A’s” story - what does he say about himself in his changing contexts, from his homeland, his escape and his resettlement in South Africa? We wanted to foreground “A’s” voice rather than our own, to open his words to others – how best to do this? Our research took a poetic turn.

### **Exposing the layers: Getting to the heart of experience**

To get a deeper impression of the sense of the self of the storyteller in terms of values, identity and agency we decided to use “I poems” in conjunction with the Listening Guide in a

similar way to that used by Koelsch (2015). “I poems” or “voice poems” (*“I” phrases are listed in order of appearance and presented as poems*) can be used to listen more closely to how participants talk about themselves and their relationships (Gilligan, 2015; Koelsch, 2015; Woodcock, 2005). Although these poems cannot be fully relied on, especially as the “I” may have different meanings across languages, they offer a way to reflect on what the participant is saying about the self and can be used together with “found” poetry (*using the actual words of the participant*) to forefront the participants voice. The use of voice poems is closely linked to the growing use of poetry as a research tool, in many cases using the language of participants to present data “to evoke an emotional response in the reader” enabling a closer imagined connection with the participant’s experience (Koelsch, 2015: 96).

We do not attempt to give a detailed background on the growth of poetic inquiry in qualitative research (*see Galvin & Prendergast, 2016*), but rather to offer reasons for its use. Poetic inquiry generally is considered a way of communicating, describing and reflecting on the richness and depth of lived experience that is required of true qualitative research (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016). Poetry engages not just the mind but also the body and soul, offering new ways to enter the experience (MacKenzie, 2013). Using poetry and other expressive arts methods such as collage, photography and reflective writing in the data collection stages of the research opens spaces for multiple interpretations of the experience. The value of poetry as process and presentation was particularly central to bringing forward the voice of the participant, for facilitating meaningful dialogue, and opening the process of interpretation. Poetic inquiry opens interpretation in a number of ways: it increases the possibility of participation; it engages in more aesthetic ways of knowing; it opens pathways for relational connectivity; it helps all parties to the research including readers to make sense of the

findings; and it offers different ways of engaging with the complexity of human experience (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016: xiii – xiv).

*in untamed terrain*

*of messy prose*

*a poem grows*

*a life shows*

*budding connections*

### **Excavation: A reflexive analysis**

The analytic process we followed is set out here as a guide for visibility and direction, and is not meant as a formula for interpreting stories. The “steps” are iterative and the paths explored would depend on the particular research. At the outset we used a worksheet technique to immerse ourselves in the data, making notes of aspects that stood out, listening for patterns, themes and emotions. As part of this immersion we used the Critical Reflexive Model as a guide to ask critical questions to listen for contextual influences. We wrote voice poems from “A’s” life story, and from a third person account of his story, using mixed voices for the interviews and dialogue that was ongoing throughout the process. The poetry was re-worked to represent different aspects of “A’s” narrative and interspersed with the researchers’ analysis that came from the layered reading. “A” was invited back into a dialogical space to revisit the effect of sharing his story and wrote his own poem which was added to foreground his voice more directly. We included various aspects of trustworthiness in the process: peer validation (working with two co-researchers), member checking (dialoguing with the participant), and varied data collection methods (triangulation). Among other techniques

these are considered important in ensuring that there is a “principled analysis” of the data (Loh, 2013: 7). The presentation below uses a mix of poetry and prose. It is not final, but remains open for further reflection and interpretation.

### **Uncovering the story: Journey from Eritrea**

Following the above process allowed the researchers to look at A’s narratives from different vantage points, to take in his history and to see how closely his context (his moments in time and place) effect his story. “A” sees this himself clearly as he says: “*My life was directly influenced by the politics of the Eritrean government,*” and “*the walks I passed in my life mostly were dictated by the regime.*” He is embedded in the politics of his country which he describes with words like ‘*control*’ and ‘*suppress.*’ “A”s’ story takes us from his birth in a family where he is bought up by his mother, going to school, military camp, and his later ‘*escape*’ across several countries to South Africa. With each step there is an overriding theme of the effect of the influences which have shaped his life – family, government, politics, socioeconomic realities, and societal expectations. We draw threads from “A”s’ story, using his words developed in the poetry to illustrate his lack of freedom and his dependence, but also his will. He is in the process of becoming his own person and finding his passion for social justice, a strong theme that develops throughout “A”s’ narrative and shapes his choices. This is his story:

*I had a dream of freedom*

*unlike the place I was born in*

*I stood by my mother*

*when she was given more freedom*

*than she wanted*  
*I tried to be a daughter*  
*while I became the man*  
*the man in house that day*  
*my father left us*  
*maybe he was seeking freedom too*

*I learnt to cook and care*  
*to doubt and to be curious*  
*to question the world around me*  
*I taught myself to see*  
*while dictated by the military*  
*not accepting the regime*  
*I was young and stubborn*

*I went to college*  
*they fed me the truth*  
*I disagreed*  
*I spat it out*  
*I quit*  
*it was the right thing to do*  
*I would not learn*  
*to be a puppet*  
*or take orders from others*  
*running a puppet show*



*I am positive*

*I am resilient*

*I have integrity*

*but sometimes*

*you have to make tough choices*

*I paid expensive dollars*

*to be smuggled to freedom*

*to the promised land of democracy*

*where I became more silent*

*I do not belong*

*nor do I understand*

*and others do not*

*understand me*

*now I read to believe*

*to know on a higher level*

*I feel pity for those who hunt*

*others that look differently*

*I try to stay safe*

*in my small garden*

*to not be targeted*

*once again*

*I love my girlfriend*

*who lives far away*

*we have hope*

*we believe*

Looking closely at the sequence of action and the influences on “A’s” life one sees a pattern emerge. “A” first sees his own life and challenges, how they influenced him:

*I looked at how I grew*

*passionate through*

*my mother and I*

*my cousin closely watched,*

*taught me how to love reading,*

*to become inquisitive*

*my community held me*

*but my government choked me*

“A” is accepting of certain roles, he embraces gender and role fluidity (*I tried to be a daughter* – for his mother; *while I became a man* – for his girlfriend, himself). However, he also looks critically at his context and starts making difficult decisions:

*I simply couldn't accept*

*the instructions*

*and be silent*

*I decided to leave*

“A” leaves because he cannot *be silent*. However, he finds himself in a new context, looking at things differently, but experiencing still a different form of silence – *In the promised land of democracy, where I became more silent, I do not belong*:

*I am not accepted*

*I am in exile*

*I am in between*

*Our understandings are different*

*I am changing*

*I am making another story*

There is much ideological and emotional struggle apparent in “A’s” story. He shows a strong belief in democracy: *“I believe democracy give most people certain power to scream out their grievances and bring change through social action.”* He also has firm beliefs in the collective, *“a society where a child is every ones’ child.”* In his interview “A” says, *“I want to always be like collective.”* His lack of freedom is clearly seen in an inability to speak out, to have a voice, for fear of being jailed. There is a yearning to do this (*to “scream” out*). He desires the “relational” but without being chained or dictated to. He needs to belong, but there is also a strong need for freedom and movement in the belonging. He is torn between his family back home, his country of birth, and his new life and freedom. It is both a choice and a lack of choice. This is seen strongly in “A’s” third person narrative account which shows more clearly the emotional impact of decisions he has had to make and the turmoil that he has experienced.

*he was a gift*

*an only son  
happy and respected  
until he was six  
and his father turned away  
still he became  
a brilliant student  
he questioned many  
he felt no rest  
he understood  
and ran away  
left his life and family  
he survived and was thankful  
now he is secure but not safe  
and his mind is unsettled  
he keeps thinking and thinking  
he is hungry with longing  
filled with guilt and desire  
he wants to deliver his people*

“A” shows a strong sense of responsibility toward his past, his family, his country (*he wants to deliver his people*) and speaks strongly about his need for working towards social justice. Values such as respect, trust and a belief in education come through in “A’s” story and become components in his identity.

## Uncovering connections: Relational reflections on sharing a life story

As part of the interview which was conducted shortly after the module, we wanted to know more about “A’s” experience of sharing his life story and witnessing those of other students. His narrative reflects a crossing of spaces, an attempt to bridge different worldviews, and to find a space for himself, a place “*in between*”.

*I am trying to understand  
things are different in this land  
here you say you will but don't  
there we say less and we do  
I am in exile and am not accepted  
when I am here I am in between  
but I am learning to go deeper  
to go deeper than you and me  
to see how we are collectively  
but first you must know yourself  
also know and accept the other  
I see we weave our stories differently*

The dialogical space provided for “A” to share his story gives him an opportunity to grapple, to try to understand and to belong. In the way he tells his story and responds to the analysis process it is clear that he values critical thinking highly. He is prepared to pay the cost for speaking controversial thoughts. Throughout “A’s” narratives there is a progression, a moving forward and, through the poetry, we find that “A’s” voice is strong despite his

challenges. If we consider agency simply as the capacity to act independently and make free choices, we see that “A” has been shaped by his contexts, but has not been constrained. He has made choices that have moved him: *I freed myself*. We see that “A” has moved (*I am making another story*), and he has a strong desire to help others, but how far does his story go (*his feelings are mixed up*)? Can he actualise his agency in this foreign context? How does sharing and examining his story help to create *another story*?

In further dialogue we explore what it means to “A” to read “his” poetry. “A” is deeply moved by the poetry, it brings back more stories, especially of home and loss. The *biggest damage* he says is loss of family. It becomes even more apparent that he is disconnected, living in between this new country and his *home*. He *wants to integrate his feelings*, but thinks he may not be good at doing that and is burdened always by an enormous sense of responsibility, thinking *always* of the sacrifices made by his mother when he was growing up. This makes his decision to continue with his education a difficult one, he *should* be working and sending money home. We ask what it is that keeps him moving forward and he talks of a plan, priorities and an imagined future. Sharing stories, he says, helps you to understand yourself, makes you see *the chains*, the influences that have shaped you. “A” is moving forward, but is always drawn back to loss and sadness, the ongoing suffering of family and friends back home. Being in exile, it seems, occupies its own space, neither here nor there, and “A” has made no real friends who he feels he can talk to who truly understand. The poem below and the one in the introduction were written by each of the co-authors independently in response to the interview data. Each poem reveals the same strands of loss and longing, a need for understanding, and a desire to belong.

*Divided*

*I think of my mother's sacrifice*

*I imagine a future, I plan*

*Understanding makes you free*

*Parts of me are somewhere far*

*I imagine a future, I plan*

*I am neither here nor there*

*Parts of me are somewhere far*

*I long for lost family*

*I am neither here nor there*

*I want to integrate*

*I long for lost family*

*I fill a space in-between*

*I want to integrate*

*Understanding makes you free*

*I fill a space in-between*

*I think of my mother's sacrifice*

Strongly woven through the threads of the poetry we feel “A’s” need to belong. He longs for acceptance and connection, yet is isolated in this faraway place. Such findings are supported by the literature on migration and belonging. Morrice (2013), uses Bourdieu’s framework

and the concept of *habitus* to conceptualise the experience of a group of refugees in higher education in the United Kingdom and concludes that understanding their experience is multi-layered. Although she warns against generalisation she states that the participants' *habitus* ("embodied dispositions") - "was indelibly marked by their refugee background, creating boundaries of belonging" (p.665). Their identity and sense of belonging could not be separated from their experience of forced migration, hostile policies, negative public discourses, and the financial and emotional burdens they often faced - leading to otherness and exclusion. This would be especially so in a country like South Africa which has been marked by hostility and xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals. As Mosselson (2010: 648) states, "The xenophobic violence represents a further instance of boundary making and constitutes a mechanism through which the politics of belonging is formulated".

Even though migrants in South Africa theoretically have basic human rights, in reality they are extremely vulnerable to the threat of being classified illegal and are often seen as enemies, blamed for a variety of social problems and appropriating the rights of citizens. In practice, therefore, they are not treated equally by both the state and citizens and have been "constructed as outside of the nation" (Mosselson, 2010: 648). We do not attempt to deal with the various causes attributed to xenophobia but the overall sense that migrants pose a threat to residents identity and rights (Solomon & Kosaka, 2014) reveals that it is not easy to be accepted (*to belong*). The boundaries are vast (social and global) and clearly require more than an individual endeavour. In light of this we ask: What does "A's" storytelling do? Does it merely highlight the boundaries he is up against (those already known from the literature), or does it offer something new, a possibility of breaking down some of these boundaries?



During the two day workshop involving experiential exercises and shared dialogue we looked more closely at these questions. “A’s” desire for connection and belonging becomes even more visible during a reflexive exercise where “A” chooses to be photographed with his arms around the sculpture of a family (see below). He labels the photograph “Respect and Acceptance” and talks again about longing for his family that he has left behind, not wanting to be seen as an outsider, the need for respect and acceptance became an embodied experience. “A’s” own poem written by him during this process brings us closer to his experience of sharing his story – *it is the hardest conversation but understanding makes it easier.*



Cellphone image entitled “Respect and Acceptance”

Makaranga Lodge, South Africa, 2016

*I feel comfortable*

*With broad understanding*

*Not judgmental*

*To feel secured*

*With broad understanding*

*Respect everyone*

*To feel secured*

*Accept people the way they are*

*Respect everyone*

*Life history is the hardest conversation*

*Accept people the way they are*

*Make it easy*

*Life story is the hardest conversation*

*Not judgmental*

*Make it easy*

*I feel comfortable*

It is clear from “A’s” poem that his values now extend beyond his own story. He talks about respect and acceptance not only in terms of wanting this for himself, but also of respecting others, accepting their different backgrounds and carrying this through in his work as he tutors a diverse group of students at the university. This latter sentiment reflects a movement from self to other (relational reflexivity), performance that is accountable collectively and not

just on an individual level. His values (respect, trust and belief in education) became a part of his commitment as a Health Promotion master's student at the time of sharing his story and now as a doctoral student with a focus on refugee support. He is "walking the talk," moving in action (performativity) and one can see clearly how his personal intersects with his professional choices as his narrative continues beyond the writing of this article.

Through storytelling people construct their identities, begin to make sense of their past, and can connect to others to nurture a sense of belonging (Reissmann, 2008). Through sharing his story, "A" begins to understand who he is. "Narrative identifying" is a useful term to describe how this progression can work interactively within stories, as it proposes a reciprocal process in terms of which people identify themselves through their stories and the stories make possible identities available – "stories teach people who they are" (Frank, 2010: 49). Perhaps this is what "A" means when he says life stories *make it easy, I feel comfortable* – he is better able to understand himself and others in his world context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 189) describe the purpose of retelling stories as offering "possibilities of reliving, for new directions and new ways of doing things". Possibilities arise then for "A" to consider his position and how it could be different, even in small ways that may later make a difference. In turn, every interaction that evolves through retelling creates the possibility of a connection (an antidote to isolation?). For example, among the students at the university who shared their stories and as reflexive researchers our roles and positions shifted and started to merge with that of "A" as his story unfolded. The dialogue led to an embodied experience, we could not remain outside the story and became participants too. As evidenced in the following poem reflecting on the cellphone image above, "A's" story has touched us emotionally and connected us.

*I thought your journey from that faraway place*

*had nothing to do with me*

*in my safe space*

*I was wrong*

*I see this only now as your story unfolds*

*I feel it only now as you hold out your arms*

*in longing, asking to belong*

### **Opening the dialogue**

Although analysis is not definitive and in many cases may not be representative of the storytellers “truth,” being open to multiple interpretations and dialogue means that the process becomes accessible and inclusive. It is important in the process for the researcher to acknowledge that he/she is *not* the expert. Evans (2016: 43) frames this well when she states that researchers can “claim an expertise in not knowing” in an endeavor to go beyond prior understanding and discover what is new. Where the research process is viewed as a “socio-ethical” process, which recognises the social nature of research interactions and the need for continuous reflexivity and dialogue between parties, the ethos of the particular participants involved is then taken into account (Skovdal & Abebe, 2012). Finding a way to ensure that an egalitarian and ethical research process is followed throughout the research process becomes a crucial aspect. Using the Critical Reflexive Model supports this process by facilitating a dialogical space and framing critical questions in relation to power, identity and values, responsible agency and accountable performance. As a basis for deconstructing

stories, such a framing makes it possible to challenge current assumptions and to move towards an acceptance of multiple standpoints and relational reflexivity. This acts both as an ethical guide for the researcher and as a tool for developing critical reflexive skills for the participant, opening the possibility for change through storytelling more widely.

During the research we found that using poetry within a dialogical narrative approach offers *a way of looking* that reveals more than the content of a story and leans closely towards the participant's felt experience. The dialogue and the poetry become "tools" of exploration and are key to our understanding that the value of stories is that they do not end, that stories "act" (Frank, 2010). It is in the dialogue that one understands how interpretation can shift and change depending on time, space and relationship – the changing context. The poetry offers an openness to further interpretation, it is an offer to tell more stories. This is well summed up in the following statement by Galvin and Prendergast (2016: xv):

"Poetry reveals, poetry has the power to open up the unexpected, to contribute to aesthetic depth, to bring us close to ambiguities with metaphor and image, it allows access to vulnerability, courage, and truth telling and playfully or poignantly forges critical insight".

In relation to "A's" experience we return to the question whether one can begin to break down the boundaries that are revealed through his story (and that of many others) through dialogue and sharing stories? We cannot break them all down but it appears a good place to start. If, as Bockarova (2016: 251) asserts, that the need to find meaning in one's life ("the need to meaningfully matter") is the principal driver from which the need to belong arises; then one can see the importance of sharing and deconstructing your story – of learning more

about who you are and what matters. The story “acts” and helps you understand more about yourself, your values and identity (Frank, 2010). Deconstructing your life story then involves taking action (is performative) in finding meaning. Further, where stories move towards developing relational reflexivity, they open the way for building connections with others. Each small interaction (story, dialogue, poem, or photograph) opens an entryway for connection and further inter-action. “A’s” final poem indicates that this has been his experience, and despite the difficulty of having the *hardest* conversation he reveals the necessity of doing so and developing a way of thinking that is not only about himself but also his relationships with others, understanding more clearly how his personal intersects with his professional decisions.

## References

- Andrews, M. Squire, C. & Tamboukou, M. 2013. Introduction: What is narrative research? in Andrews, M. Squire, C. & Tamboukou, M. (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), London: Sage. [Kindle version].
- Bockarova, M. 2016. Does one truly need to belong?: A case for the need to meaningfully exist. *Semiotica*. 210: 251-257. DOI 10.1515/sem-2016-0026.
- Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F. 2000. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers.
- De Vos, A.S. Strydom, H. Fouche, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L. 2011. *Research at*

*Grassroots: For the social sciences and human services professions* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.) Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Doucet, A. & Mauthner, N.S. 2008. What can be known and how? Narrated subjects and the Listening Guide. *Qualitative Research* 8:399. DOI:10.1177/1468794106093636

Evans, K. 2016. A/R/T(HERAPIST)-OGRAPHY, Examining the Weave. In *Poetic Inquiry II – Seeing, Caring, Understanding*. Galvin & Prendergast, Eds. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Frank, A. W. 2010. *Letting stories breathe: A Social-Narratology*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London.

Galvin, K. & Prendergast, M. 2016. Introduction. In *Poetic Inquiry II – Seeing, Caring, Understanding*. Galvin & Prendergast, Eds. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Gergen, K.J. 1999. *An Invitation to Social Construction*. London: Sage Publications.

Gergen, K.J. 2009. *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gilbert, A. & Sliep, Y. 2009. Reflexivity in the practice of social action: from self-to inter-relational reflexivity. *South African Journal of Psychology*. 39(4): 468-479.

Gilligan, C. 2015. The Listening Guide Method of Psychological Inquiry, *Qualitative Psychology*. 2(1):69-77.

Hollingsworth, S. & Dybdahl, M. 2007. Talking to Learn: The critical role of conversation in narrative inquiry. In *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. D.J. Clandinin, Ed. California: Sage Publications,

Koelsch, L.E. 2015. I Poems: Evoking Self. *Qualitative Psychology*. 2(1): 96-107.

Loh, J. 2013. Inquiry into Issues of Trustworthiness and Quality in Narrative Studies: A Perspective. *The Qualitative Report*. 18(33): 1–15. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss33/1>.

MacKenzie, S.K. 2013. Poetic Praxis: Engaging Body, Mind, and Soul in the Social Foundations Classroom. *Journal of Learning through the Arts*. 9(1).<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/15g9b91z>

Mishler, E. 1986. *Language, Meaning and Narrative Analysis. Research Interviewing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Morrice, L. 2013. Refugees in higher education: boundaries of belonging and recognition, stigma and exclusion. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. 32(5): 625-668.

Mosselson, A. 2010. ‘There is no difference between citizens and non-citizens anymore’: Violent Xenophobia, Citizenship and the Politics of Belonging in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 36(3): 641-655. DOI: 10.1080/03057070.2010.507570. Link <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2010.507570>.



Naidu, T. & Sliep, Y. 2011. Contextual Reflexivity: Towards contextually relevant research with South African HIV/AIDS Home-Based Care Volunteers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 10(4): 431– 443.

Reissman, C.K. 1993. Narrative Analysis. *Qualitative Research Methods*. 30.  
London: Sage Publications.

Reissman, C.K. 2008. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. London: Sage Publications. [Kindle version].

Rule, P. 2006. Bakhtin and the poetics of pedagogy: a dialogic approach. *Journal of Education*. 40: 79–101.

Skovdal, M. & Abebe, T. 2012. Reflexivity and Dialogue: Methodological and Socio-Ethical Dilemmas in Research with HIV-Affected Children in East Africa. *Ethics, Policy and Environment*. 15(1): 77–96.

Sliep, Y. 2010. Teaching for transformation: the use of narrative metaphor to develop reflexive professionals. *Acta Academica: Teaching of psychology in South Africa: Supplementum 2*: 109-132.

Sliep, Y. & Kotze, E. 2007. Weaving a learning community by the telling, deconstructing and re-telling of life stories. In *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Kobus Maree Ed. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. 138-150.

Sliep, Y. 2014. Narrative reflexive methodology. Unpublished manuscript.

Sliep, Y. & Norton, L. 2016. Trees, poems and drama to create reflexive spaces for peace building in schools. In *Peace education for violence prevention in fragile African societies: What's going to make a difference?* Sylvester Mpahosa & Alphonse Keasley, Eds. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa. 243-274.

Solomon, H. & Kosaka, H. 2014. Xenophobia in South Africa: Reflections, Narratives and Recommendations. *Southern African Peace and Security Studies*. 2(2): 5–29.

Spector-Mersel, G. 2014. Special Issue: Multiplicity and Commonality in Narrative Interpretation. *Narrative Works: Issues, Investigations, & Interventions*.4(1):1-18.

Woodcock, C. 2005. The Silenced Voice in Literacy: Listening beyond Words to a “Struggling” Adolescent Girl. *Journal of Authentic Learning*. 2(1): 47-60.

### **Acknowledgements**

We thank the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Teaching and Learning Office for supporting this research. We would also like to thank the participant in this case study for the invaluable role he played.

#### **4.4 From the personal to the professional: Does reflexivity last?**

**Paper 4:** Norton & Sliep – Hindsight and foresight for better insight

# Hindsight and Foresight for Better Insight

Lynn Norton & Yvonne Sliep

## Abstract

The article examines the benefits of developing critically reflexive learners through life story work; and considers the value of following such an approach based on a Critical Reflexive Model. The model focuses on four aspects explored by students who are invited to share their life stories in a safe, dialogical space: the deconstruction of power, values informing identity and their own moral compass, agency linked to response-ability and accountability, and performance translating theory to praxis. Research indicates that critical relational reflexivity equips students to better navigate their personal and professional social contexts. We take this a step further to explore whether such skills are transferrable over time and what contributions this has made to the lives of students who have experienced this methodology over a period of time after graduating. Using a mix of creative and dialogical methodologies, we explore how and whether these students appreciate the need to look beyond the self and see the bigger relational and contextual story and whether this leads to a more accountable and active participation in community. Our findings indicate that with increased critical reflexivity, students experience shifts in their perception of self, others and their contexts which they report make them better placed to respond to themselves, others and the complexities of society in both current and future contexts.

**Key words:** Critical reflexivity, life stories, Critical Reflexive Model, education, dialogical, creative methodologies, narrative approaches in education.

## 1. Introduction

In this article we examine the benefits of experiential teaching and learning work involving life stories that has been done with Health Promotion Masters' students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The relevant module, the Personal is the Professional (the "module"), facilitates learning spaces for students to share and deconstruct their personal stories collectively to increase insight and ability to respond to their own and other's contexts. This process is facilitated by applying a Critical Reflexive Model (the "model") (Sliep and Norton 2016) within a narrative approach to develop students' critical reflexive skills. The model focuses on four aspects explored by students in a carefully facilitated dialogical space: the deconstruction of power, values informing identity, agency linked to responsibility, and performance of self in daily life and in a work context (Gilbert and Sliep 2009; Sliep and Gilbert 2006; Sliep and Norton 2016; Norton and Sliep 2017a). Students are invited through a range of mindfully developed experiential exercises to analyse their stories in relation to each aspect of the model. Use of a narrative approach within this framework deepens the exploration of pathways to critical reflexivity (Sliep and Norton 2016). Students are also exposed to stories beyond their own context and invited to challenge their assumptions and intentions within a social constructionist paradigm. It is argued that such

reflexivity is crucial for the development of critical consciousness, revealing power dynamics, enabling agency and to better understand others in context (Gilbert and Sliep 2009; Sliep and Gilbert 2006). Creating spaces that value and support the telling of and listening to personal stories is viewed as an empowering activity that helps create meaning and shape identity (Rappaport 1995). Further, bringing the self into practice helps students question their understandings about how life works within their own contexts, thereby developing reflective skills that are deemed essential for the development of knowledge and practice across a number of disciplines (Graham 2017).

The model has previously been interrogated as a tool for promoting reflexivity in health promotion education (*see* Norton and Sliep 2017a, which details the development and elements of the model and its application to life stories). Findings indicate that the process of sharing and deconstructing stories in terms of the model helps equip students with the reflexive skills necessary to better negotiate their current social contexts. The aim of this section of the research is to more fully explore the question whether such skills are transferrable over time – does reflexivity last? We wanted to find out what contributions this approach has made to the personal and professional lives of students since doing the module and what impact it has had going forward. In an endeavour to answer these questions we brought together a group of students who had graduated, to track their reflexivity from an educational to a professional setting. In doing so we explored the benefits of facilitating a safe space for students to talk about their lived experiences and hear those of others and contextualise them to better understand themselves, others and the complexities of society. Such an approach is considered particularly necessary in a South African (SA) educational context that offers a complex set of challenges particularly relating to our apartheid and colonial history.

## **2. Critical reflexivity and stories in education**

There are a variety of ways to describe critical reflexivity but we view it here as comprising an appraisal of the self as a participant of collective action. This involves understanding that our actions are formed through interactions with others in our environment (Gilbert and Sliep 2009). Cunliffe (2004, 407) describes reflexivity practically as “examining critically the assumptions underlying our actions”. In education, such an appraisal is aided when viewed as a dynamic process that opens students to developing a critical consciousness that is necessary for them to become self-determining learners and socially responsible professionals (Mangadu 2014). Sharing life stories through a narrative approach invites students to work with their lived experiences in a way that links their personal discourses to their professional lives (Sliep and Kotze 2007). When this methodology is followed within a critically reflexive framework, stories are deconstructed in a safe, dialogical space by identifying critical incidents, challenging dominant discourses, recognising values and strengthening identity. This opens the way for the development of agency and accountable performance in a learning community (Sliep 2010; Sliep and Kotze 2007).

Bruner (1987) views stories about one's own life as inherently reflexive as the narrator and the central person in the story are the same person. Examining our own lives in this way creates a consciousness of how we come to view ourselves and others in the way that we do. Developing an awareness of how "we construct and participate in constructing our world and our knowledge about the world" is a key reflexive ability for developing critical reflection (White, Fook and Gardner 2006, 18). Critical reflection, a term often used interchangeably with critical reflexivity depending on the perspective of the researcher, as described below sums up the desired process aptly:

Critical reflection is the process by which adults identify the assumptions governing their actions, locate the historical and cultural origins of the assumptions, question the meaning of the assumptions, and develop alternative ways of acting (Stein 2000, 1 cited in White, Fook and Gardner 2006, 12)

The process of being reflexive opens possibilities for transformative learning (TL) or changes in perception that occur as students develop skills to help them to challenge how they view themselves within their own stories and in society. TL has been defined in a number of ways, but of relevance here is an expansive description by Kroth and Cranton (2014, 9) of TL as a "deep shift in perspective during which habits of mind become more open, more permeable, more discriminating, and better justified". In life story work such a shift in perspective becomes possible through critiquing one's own story to better understand the operation of power, leading to a better understanding of one's internalised habits and beliefs. Mezirow (1997, 5) refers to TL as a "process of effecting change in a *frame of reference*" that includes the values, associations, concepts and feelings that define our world; and which can become more inclusive and less discriminating in the right circumstances. Our frames of reference (habits of mind) are made up of our assumptions which are influenced by our whole context from the psychological to the political (Mezirow 2009, 1997,). A full understanding of the self therefore depends on an understanding of our cultural, social and political lives (Dirkx 1998). Thereafter, transforming our frames of reference requires critically reflecting on the assumptions we generally take for granted, which is aided by participating in dialectical discourse to validate new judgements formed during this process (Mezirow 2009, 1997). Analysing our stories helps us to develop an understanding of our habits of mind, while listening to the stories of others in a dialogical space exposes us to different perspectives, contexts, and possible misconceptions that we hold about others. It is now widely accepted that TL is not just an individual endeavour but that understanding others and cultural context is vital to understanding learning. Transforming perspectives can, for example, lead to greater awareness of "interdependent positionality" rather than having increased autonomy as a goal (Merriam and Ntseane 2008, 14).

TL, like storytelling, is about "meaning-making." Instead of attaching old meaning to new experiences, it involves a re-interpretation of our experiences by critically appraising old assumptions and beliefs (Merriam and Ntseane 2008). Graham (2017, 4) explains the reflective process as one that allows us to examine our meaning-making process which is influenced by our subjectivity and embodiment of the discourses that impact our lives. She

brings together reflection and narrative as “weaving a pattern of knowing and self-inquiry” and explains that, “[t]he stories we tell about our lives knit together with our evolving identities, embracing our lives in various way.” By better understanding how they are positioned within discourses, students can develop the ability and agency to critique the status quo and to play a more active role to position themselves more favourably (Sliep 2010). The power of the self-telling process is that, “[i]n the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives,” as “life is not “how it was” but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and re-told” (Bruner 1987, 15 and 31). The shifts that happen when we come to understand how we interpret our reality, open our potential for building preferred stories and accepting different world views. This is transformative in the sense that it becomes possible to see how we position ourselves and then better able to position ourselves differently.

### **3. Study design, aims and methodology**

This is a qualitative study using creative and dialogical research methodology with a group of students who had completed the module in the last twelve years and were followed up as professionals in the field or furthering their studies. Participants were invited to share their experiences at an intensive two day data-gathering workshop (the “workshop”) through a variety of experiential exercises in a tranquil and natural setting which was especially chosen to enhance and deepen reflexivity. Bryant (2015, 1) is of the view that reflexivity for researchers “requires a purposely carved space to attempt to sit back and question our place as one who asks questions and attempts to answer them”. In the same way as this is true for researchers, we wanted to provide a creative space for participants to deeply reflect on their experiences. We wanted to understand more about the reflexive skills that are developed through life story work, whether these skills are transferred from the teaching space into participants “real” lives, and what value they may have in different and future contexts. These are not simple questions as we are inquiring about change and possible transformation - a different way of interacting in society. Such understandings are often not immediately apparent and may be hidden from a person’s consciousness. Stimulating deep, reflective responses from participants required using a variety of methods to tap into their conscious and subconscious understandings of personal change.

#### **3.1 Sampling**

We used convenience sampling to gather a group of past students prepared to share their understandings at the workshop. The diagram below illustrates the composition of our final sample representing students who were able to attend the workshop. The sample included ten past students from different race groups, five male and five female, with six from SA and four from a variety of other countries across Africa (*see* Table 1).

**Table 1: Sample: Health Promotion Masters students attending data-gathering workshop, May 2016**

	Male/Female	Nationality	HP Masters Attendance	2016 Position
P1	Male	South African (Indian)	2006	Touch Therapy Clinician
P2	Male	South African (White)	2006	Small business
P3	Female	South African (White)	2008	Stay-home mother
P4	Female	South African (Black)	2013	Unemployed
P5	Female	South African (Indian)	2013	Assistant at pharmacy
P6	Female	South African (White)	2013	Clinical internship
P7	Male	Zimbabwe (Black)	2014	PhD Student
P8	Male	Zimbabwe (Black)	2014	PhD Student
P9	Female	Congo (Black)	2014	PhD Student, Tutor
P10	Male	Eritrea (Black)	2015	PhD Student, Tutor

### 3.2 Data collection and analysis: An experiential exploration

We followed a reflexive and participatory approach to collecting and analysing the data that involved a variety of qualitative methods including using methods offered by grounded theory especially in regard to coding strategy and analytical questioning of the data. Charmaz (2012, 2) describes grounded theory as, “a systematic method of analysing and collecting data to develop middle-range theories”. Although it begins in inductive inquiry, it is an *interactive* method that includes both inductive and deductive reasoning once a researcher begins testing particular theoretical assumptions. Previous research had already provided some evidence of the value of following a critical reflexive approach in education and of the utility of using the model as a guiding framework for developing critical reflexive skills (Norton and Sliep 2017 a and b; Sliep 2010; Sliep and Kotze 2007); however, we still required more rigorous evidence of this, particularly in relation to *what* the long term benefits are and *why* the model was proving effective. Grounded theory has been proposed as a “tool to answer ‘why’ questions” (Charmaz 2012, 4); and opened a way for us to analytically consider not only the emerging data interactively with our student participants, but also to ask critical questions in terms of the model. Although we did not strictly follow all the strategies in grounded theory, it provided a useful process to work towards answering our research questions.

We used a variety of creative exercises to generate text for analysis including structured interviews and presentations, reflecting in nature, reflexive writing exercises, using cell-phone photographs, poetry, and collage work. Exercises were done individually and in groups and ended with a collective collage in which participants collaborated in the research analysis by identifying themes and patterns that had emerged for them during the workshop. This can be viewed as using a “layering” approach which includes participants as co-researchers, but also allows for emotion and a more sensory understanding of their experiences (Bryant 2015). Being reflexive is about being open to alternative realities (Gergen 2009); and as this is a



subjective experience one needs to look towards creative ways to uncover this. A mix of creative methods can also help to give meaning to or explain experiences that are difficult to describe, or that involve emotional as well as cognitive responses (Bryant 2015). Further, expressive arts are used in research to contextualise meaning in a subjective way to help uncover deeper meaning, experiences and insights (Brady 2009; Gallardo, Furman and Kulkarni 2009; Rogers 1993).

All exercises involved verbal or written responses from participants explaining their positions, for example, in relation to choice of photographs and representations in the collage. These were transcribed and together with other written text were analysed using a mix of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) coupled with a coding process that used gerunds in terms of grounded theory (Charmaz 2012). In this way we coded for both topics and themes (thematic); and actions and processes (gerunds). We did this interactively with the data to make comparisons with the themes identified by the participants. We also critically analysed the overall findings using questions framed by the model following a dialogical approach to delve more deeply into the question: *why* these results? (Frank 2010; Norton and Slied 2017b). With emerging results showing that the central theme and process was one of “change” in the way participants viewed themselves, others, and their context; we went a step further to explore the links between the processes and outcomes to highlight the necessary preconditions for this interaction, and to draw conclusions about the efficacy of the model as a framework for developing critical reflexivity.

Our findings are presented using a mix of tables, explanatory narrative interspersed with quotations from participants, and “found” poetry which uses the actual words and phrases of the participants to form illustrative poems of the results. Found poetry can be used in different ways, either as an analytic inquiry tool or, as we have done, as a form of presentation. Either way, it is considered as a means to “bring the researcher closer to the data in different and sometimes unusual ways that can yield new and important insights” (Butler-Kisber 2002, 235). Cell phone images are added to reveal another layer of the experience presented by participants, but were only analysed in terms of explanations given by participants and so became part of the textual analysis. In keeping with the principle that no single understanding is ever adequate, the presentation of our data includes photographs, original quotations and poetry, weaving together the words of participants, to leave our analysis open to further interpretation by the reader (Frank 2010).

#### **4. Findings**

The findings of the study are presented first from the perspective of the participants and then findings from the coding process are offered in a way that shows the interaction between process and outcomes. These findings indicated strong shifts in the changing perceptions of participants in self-, relational-, and contextual awareness. The themes are explored individually and then in an illustrative overview to highlight the inter-connectivity of all processes.

## 4.1 Participatory analysis

We worked closely with participants during the workshops to reveal not only the values they identified for themselves as having crystallised during and after their experience of the module, but also the themes they saw emerging from the overall practice of being reflexive students and practitioners. In the final collage the participants were asked to identify themes that they felt strongly represented their experiences of reflexivity. They identified seven major themes: the difficulty but value of sharing stories; search of the self; diversity; tolerance; togetherness; happiness; and uncertainty (*see* Figure 1). These themes were very closely tied to the values the participants identified as having crystallised for each of them during and since the module (*see* Table 2).



**Figure 1: Group collage, May 2016**

Overall Themes Identified by Participants	Individual Values Identified by Participants
Sharing stories	Resilience – Creativity – Empowerment
Search of self	Increased self-awareness
Diversity	Respect for others(x2)
Tolerance	Non-judgemental
Togetherness	Acceptance - Team work - Cohesion
Happiness	Confidence and freedom
Uncertainty	Flexibility and openness

**Table 2: Themes and values identified by participants at data gathering workshop (2016)**

These findings are reflected in a collective poem using lines of poetry written by the participants during the workshop to express their reflection on sharing their stories. After the participants gave their reflections in poetic style, the lines that stood out while we listened were captured and are expressed here in a pantoum, showing powerfully the importance of trust, non-judgement, the value of diversity, and the growth in confidence that comes from a deeper understanding of the self:

*Not judgemental where my tree of life grows  
Trust is important in sharing  
The importance of diversity and team work  
I am a work in progress*

*Trust is important in sharing  
There are so many layers to me  
I am a work in progress  
Beautiful from the inside out  
Not ashamed of who I am*

*There are so many layers to me  
Like a pearl in an oyster  
Beautiful from the inside out  
Not ashamed of who I am  
The deeper you look the more you see*

*Like a pearl in an oyster  
The importance of diversity and team work  
The deeper you look the more you see  
Not judgemental where my tree of life grows*

Further evidence is provided in cell phone photographs taken by participants working in pairs and interacting with statues in the garden to capture a deeper expression of their experiences. The participants used the images to reveal vivid descriptions of their reflections and these were coded and analysed as part of the data [see Fig. 3].



Figure 3: Cell phone photographs representing characteristics valued by participants: [1] Empowerment [2] Confidence and freedom [3] Team work and appreciation of the power of the collective

#### **4.2 A dynamic interaction of process and outcomes**

Coding across all the data included taking into consideration the themes identified by the participants and a critical questioning of what was happening during the process. Reflexivity is a dynamic and iterative process and we discovered during the analysis that the process described by participants (experience of reflexivity) interconnected very closely with the outcomes (results of reflexivity) that were identified in terms of the themes. When probing the data even more critically – by asking *why* these outcomes, the themes revealed also a close tie between the manner in which the process was facilitated (necessary pre-conditions) and the outcomes (*see* Table 3).

**Table 3: Patterns, themes and sub-themes identified in the data**

<b>PROCESS</b> (Coding in gerunds)	<b>OUTCOMES</b> (Coding for patterns and themes)	<b>PRE-CONDITIONS</b> (Critical questioning)
<p><b>Process of change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming aware</li> <li>• Getting a broader understanding</li> <li>• Starting to appreciate others</li> <li>• Working through uncertainty</li> <li>• Becoming more reflective</li> <li>• Having a more holistic approach</li> </ul>	<p><b>Change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in self</li> <li>• Change in perceptions (ways of seeing the world)</li> <li>• Change in perceptions of others (embracing diversity)</li> <li>• Uncertainty as a result of change</li> </ul>	<p><b>Developing skills for change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical and reflective thinking</li> <li>• Questioning and challenging assumptions</li> <li>• Seeing things from different perspectives</li> <li>• Communication and expression</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Empowerment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Process of self-exploration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking time to explore</li> <li>• Digging deeper</li> <li>• Reflecting on past experience</li> <li>• Being critical</li> <li>• Being reflective</li> <li>• Questioning</li> <li>• Understanding construction of the self</li> <li>• Becoming more open-minded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Self-awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong sense of identity</li> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Aware of strengths &amp; weaknesses</li> <li>• Authenticity</li> <li>• Resilience and overcoming obstacles</li> <li>• Focus on values</li> <li>• Positive outcomes – happiness, peace</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supporting transformation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time, space and opportunity for self-discovering</li> <li>• Space for voice</li> <li>• Witnessing the stories of others</li> <li>• Building trust</li> <li>• Supportive, safe space</li> <li>• Evoking emotions</li> <li>• Guided process</li> </ul>
<p><b>Process for social cohesion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing people together</li> <li>• Learning about other cultures</li> <li>• Learning to trust others</li> <li>• Accepting people</li> <li>• Respecting others</li> <li>• Embracing diversity</li> <li>• Not making assumptions about others</li> <li>• Moving towards collectivist views</li> </ul>	<p><b>Relational-awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity</li> <li>• Understanding other perspectives</li> <li>• Collective vs individualist views</li> <li>• Tolerance, respect and acceptance of others</li> <li>• Value of team work</li> <li>• Positive outcomes – togetherness and social cohesion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Facilitating connectivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being in a group and sharing journey</li> <li>• Finding commonalities in overcoming obstacles</li> <li>• Influence of diversity in group</li> <li>• Facilitating open discussion to challenge stereotypes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Holistic and dynamic process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysing context more consciously</li> <li>• Understanding others in context</li> <li>• Taking context and circumstances into account</li> <li>• Holding a broader view</li> </ul>	<p><b>Contextual –awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of context</li> <li>• Holistic approach to working with others</li> <li>• Positive outcomes – better understanding of broader issues</li> <li>• Seeing the bigger picture</li> </ul>	<p><b>Linking the personal and the professional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing personal stories and challenges</li> <li>• Understanding influence of past and present experiences on future choices</li> <li>• Understanding of self in relation to others and wider societal context</li> </ul>

The data revealed four strong overlapping and dynamic themes that are explored separately only for expediency: self-awareness, relational-awareness, contextual-awareness, and positive change. The themes are closely tied to the process that evolved through the facilitation of a reflexive and dialogical space: exploring self, leading to self-awareness; building social cohesion leading to relational awareness; and following a holistic approach that takes the surrounding environment and background into account, leading to contextual awareness. Further, undergoing a process of change (learning that is potentially transformative) facilitates growth and opens the possibility for students to challenge their own assumptions and beliefs and the status quo. These themes are in a constant state of flux, interconnecting and interacting with each other, and are illustrated and further explored below using direct quotations from participants.

### **4.3 Self-awareness: A journey of discovery**

Attaining self-awareness was closely linked to a search and/or discovery of the self and was strongly reflected as a positive accomplishment in the words of participants. Having once believed that it was better to remain silent and not share her experiences, one participant said she began to understand that it was “ok to share my experiences” and to explore the layers to reveal who she really was. Increased self-awareness was seen to lead to self-acceptance, enabling one to embrace oneself authentically. A better understanding of the self, opened the way for participants to see their identity as one that they could shape and control and thus navigate themselves more effectively through their worlds. Students are given the opportunity to see themselves and others differently by better understanding how they position themselves within dominant discourses, paving the way for growth and change.

*“My experience of telling my story was an opportunity of learning about myself and discovering what I have passed through in a more professional way.”*

*“I gained a clearer, firmer understanding of how I fitted into the world, how I had positioned myself.”*

*“I’m more self-aware of myself and this awareness enables me to navigate through the world as I now understand myself more in relation to others”*

*“My identity is in a process of constant change. It is fluid in a way and the events that we experience as individuals shape my identity.... My identity evolved, and continues to evolve.”*

### **4.4 Relational-awareness: Accepting others**

Hand-in-hand with increased self-acceptance came an increase in relational awareness, tolerance, acceptance and non-judgement of others.

*“The life story work significantly influenced the way I view myself in this world. I now view myself as an important component that is important to others and also vice-versa.”*

*“You know we did a lot of reflection exercises to be more self-aware, and with that came more flexibility, more open(ness) to others”*

*“It’s linked to a shared understanding or feeling that everyone is facing an obstacle no matter what their circumstances and that we must not take people for granted or their circumstances for granted.”*

One participant said that as her self-awareness grew she began to see things from others’ perspectives, to be less individualistic and self-absorbed and to take a more holistic approach towards others, including her clients. Another participant who *“grew up as one who believes in individual achievement,”* said:

*“I started to appreciate the power of the collective and teamwork at the same time.... I realized how team work can make people achieve, how does this thing impact on my experience? I am not actually working because reading for my PhD but find myself doing a lot of things in the community.”*

#### **4.5 Contextual awareness: Seeing the bigger picture**

Self-awareness and the increased awareness of the importance of connecting with others also translates into a better contextual awareness, an ability to *see the bigger picture*. As one participant stated in acknowledgement of witnessing the stories of others:

*“It was an experience of sharing, learning, understanding, embracing and developing the big picture of commonality and humanity.”*

The positive impact of this is well put by another participant, *“When you have (a) good understanding of social phenomenon around you, one is in a better position to advocate for social change.”*

Having contextual savvy is beneficial to the individual who better understands his /her own positioning, and for others in their social and professional context, for example, clients. Responding to questions about what these realisations have meant to participants in their lives after the module and in relation to others and their professions, participants said the following:

*“Professionally I can relate to others with respect irrespective of my perceived superior position or different background.”*

*“It means opening a door and expanding myself... believing that people in another way around might (have) had their own challenges, but accept and respect them for who they are and not to be judgemental.”*

*“To have a much broader and flexible understanding of people, the importance of teamwork and the advantages of being able to work as part of a multidisciplinary team.”*

*“I believe that I am a more authentic, more holistic professional because of what I learned.”*

One participant expanded on the importance of being non-judgemental, and accepting others beliefs and cultures especially in a SA context, by saying:

*“ I think in the work environment how this has helped me is, you know especially in SA we deal with very diverse people, and actually a lot of the clients we have are not from the same background as me, so its helped me to be able to communicate with people more effectively to be able to take into account peoples past circumstances, their backgrounds, environments they have grown up in, different beliefs and respecting that.”*

Another participant, now a clinical psychologist, talks about the impact of doing the life story module before going into clinical training and how it gave her a broader approach to working with individual clients, understanding that each person comes from a wider context with a bigger story that needs to be taken into account.

*“You know unfortunately the clinical environment... is very individualistic, it is, so I think you have to constantly be aware of the broader approach. So I think for me it was a great stepping stone towards being there so you are constantly reflecting....If I had gone straight into clinical,... I think I would have stuck with my old ideals of being focused more self-centered, so I think with this I am able to have a better understanding of others, and also working a lot with victims as well, so being able to see it perhaps from their perspective as well.... you are taking a more holistic approach and seeing ok there are other circumstances, there are social circumstances... that all make up this particular person in the room right now.”*

#### **4.6 Changing the story**

In all of the above themes participants reveal a process of change or shifts in perspective – from being unaware to becoming more aware and thus moving from a more self-centred approach to a more relational approach. This was also reflected in an exercise in which we asked participants to explore their before and after experiences of sharing their stories. Phrases used by participants in their responses were formed into a “found” poem showing the shifts that took place using their own words:

##### ***Before I shared my story***

*I was rigid in my thinking*

*Too worried by what others thought*

*Was I good enough?*

*I was closed in, shy*

*Not able to express myself*



*I did not want to go deep  
Interrogate my past  
I was lost in a way  
I had not contemplated  
How the changes in South Africa  
Had affected my identity*

***After I shared my story***

*I was more self-aware, critical, flexible  
The entire picture of my growing up became clear  
I became confident  
I realized that I'm a fighter, a survivor  
Someone who is resilient  
And goes for what she wants  
I realized how the world around us  
Impacts our development*

***Before I heard your story***

*I didn't really know who you were  
Just took you at face value  
I was self-centered  
Totally committed to minding my own business  
I viewed you as someone in control  
I was quick to judge  
I didn't understand  
Why you acted the way you did  
I did not take into account  
What you had been through*

***After I heard your story***

*I learnt to appreciate you  
Respect who you really are  
Built by your situation  
I realised we all approach life differently  
Now I can relate to you, appreciate you  
See you embedded in your context  
I realise we all have different views  
But it is important to work collaboratively  
As much as we are different  
We have so many things in common  
I rescinded my judgment*

***And now***

*I need to constantly reflect*

*On my own and others experiences  
I have to practice to be aware  
I take time to understand  
And appreciate your history  
I am able to express myself  
At a deeper level*

These words reveal not only a more insightful acceptance of the self and other, but go further in realising that “we all approach life differently” and thereby appreciating and embracing difference – the opposite of “othering.”

#### **4.7 An illustrative overview**

A strong illustration of all the themes interwoven into one student’s story comes from a participant who was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, grew up in Zambia, and has now lived in SA for ten years. Navigating her diverse background has been difficult, *“'cos I couldn't relate to one country, I couldn't relate to who I am.”* However, through the process of reflexive storytelling she says, *“I've learnt to embrace myself and my diversity and to relate to all three countries and what I want to pass across to different people (is) that they are who they are and they should embrace themselves and be happy and go for the big life.”*

During the exercise on values and choosing a representative statue the participant chose an image of herself next to the “Statue of David” and captioned it “resilience,” stressing the importance of being authentic (*see* Figure 4). She explains why:

*“So doing the HP (Health Promotion) course when I was sharing my story, I actually did realise that I have gone through so much, and so the characteristic that came up for me was resilience. So I realised that I'm actually very resilient despite everything that I went through I was able to actually bounce back to life...the story was a mirror, a reflection 'cos I actually didn't get the time to reflect on my experiences. So sharing my story was like getting an opportunity to reflect, to actually see myself, ....I had to learn to embrace myself. So this statue being naked, for me it should present the person, showing who they really are. This is who they are and not afraid to be themselves. They actually naked, but as you can see this statue, like this person is proud, they are okay with who they are. They are not ashamed of who they are. So for me that's how I related to this statue, that this is who I am, and I embrace myself, and I am not ashamed of who I am.... I'm gonna be myself, and I'm gonna love myself and I'll be proud of who I am.”*

On the process of sharing her story and awakening to an awareness of her resilience, the participant explains:

*“Sharing your story is something that actually awakens your eyes, like you get to see things from a different perspective. So it's like a gel that opens your eyes and you start seeing things*

*and you try to understand your own life and things that you're not aware of you know they come, maybe its things that were in your subconscious, comes to your conscious.”*

The following short segment of a poem written by the participant during the workshop sums up how the process changed her:

*I can relate with you  
Not ashamed of who I am  
Embracing my uniqueness and taking one step at a time  
The beauty of life*



Figure 4. Cellphone image, caption: Resilience

In regard to taking these realisations into the workplace, the participant, a senior tutor, says:

*“You know this is who I am and I can actually do something and add some value in people's lives and that's what I try to also embrace - every student's uniqueness, trying to relate to them on the level as well as relating to each person individually, considering their diverse culture and how they were brought up.”*

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 A transformative process**

The data indicates that a transformative process has taken place among all participants. We see this in their increased awareness of themselves, others, and/or their social context.

Although not all participants change in the same way and different participants experience aspects of the process in their own unique way, all indicate that some form of a realisation

that has taken place (about themselves, others, or their work), or that they now see things differently. These shifts in perspective vary from self-awareness and personal strength to how they view others in community. This is confirmed by the participants in written responses to the question “*How did the life story work you did during the module influence how you see yourself in the world?*” which are merged into a poem, once again using the actual words of the participants:

*I became  
more self-aware  
more informed, and better armed  
I had a clearer, firmer understanding  
of how I view myself in this world  
of how I fit into this world*

*Stepping into my personal strength, I became  
more open to those around me  
not making assumptions  
taking people at face value*

Although developing critical reflexive skills does not cover the entire process of TL as envisaged by Mezirow, these changes in awareness could be viewed as a shifting in one’s meaning perspectives which can cover a range of interpretations about various social issues and psychological responses (Mezirow 2008). In this sense there are a wide range of possible changes or learnings that can take place within individuals whose experiences can differ considerably. For learning to be considered significant, Merriam and Clark (1991) emphasise that such learning should be subjectively valued by and personally affect the learner. These learning experiences then impact learners on a continuum between what the authors term an *expansion* of the sense of self, life perspective or skills, or a *transformation* in the sense described by Mezirow. In this study the shifts that we see in the way learners view themselves, others and their contexts, no matter where on such a continuum, are opening pathways that Merriam and Clark (1991, 183) describe as leading to “a greater capacity for dealing with subsequent life experience”.

Relationally, providing circumstances that open us to more integrative and inclusive frames of reference, for example by experiencing others’ cultures and critically reflecting on our own biases, we can become more accepting and tolerant of others (Mezirow 1997). Cunliffe (2004) describes critically reflexive practice as involving both the examination of our assumptions underlying why we act in certain ways and the *impact* of those actions. Through such an analysis, we are then better able to develop more ethical and collaborative ways of responding to others. When we understand reflexivity as relational in the sense that it arises in interaction with others and occurs in “continuously constructed” contexts; it becomes necessary to be mindful of where, when, and with whom action takes place (Gilbert and Sliep 2009, 470). In this sense self-, relational- and contextual-reflexivity are part of the same dynamic and iterative process envisaged by the practice of moving through the loops of the

model within a dialogical space that encourages examining one's own story amidst the stories of others and not as stand-alone tales.

## **5.2 Challenges and potentials**

Although the results show a very positive outcome from a diverse set of students, our sample was not large. Was this particular group of students who were willing to come to the data gathering workshop representative of others who have experienced the module? Maybe not, and perhaps not every student or even every group of students will experience such positive results. Fook and Askeland (2007), in relation to critical reflection training with social workers and health professionals, highlight possible cultural challenges involved in this type of work which need to be taken into account. Quite rightly, they warn that we cannot make the assumption that critical reflection will be the same for everyone and students may, for example, have different outlooks towards communication and dialogue, and professional helping and workplace cultures. In this sense “desirable outcomes” may be perceived differently by the educator and students or between students.

The research does, however, indicate the overall value of facilitating safe dialogical spaces over time in a structured environment for the development of critical reflexive skills for students, and of providing a theoretical framework for strengthening these skills. The data gathered at the workshop showed that reflexive shifts are deep seated and do carry over from the learning space into the professional. Participants experienced a shift in the way they thought about themselves, others, and the way in which they approach their work and their clients or students, depending on their context. This indicated a shift not only in their thinking but also in performativity, going beyond their performance during module itself. However, as shown, each individual is different and not all experience reflexivity in the same way or to the same degree. It was apparent during the research that the potential benefits of facilitating a dialogical space and offering the tools for reflexive practice will be limited or augmented by the ability of the particular individual to respond in terms of where they are positioned in their story at that moment in time. This may mean a shift in the self, other, or contextual view points and not necessarily in all domains. The effect of various other factors, in addition to culture, such as the developmental stage of the participant, the homogeneity of the group, personality types, and persistent structural difficulties need also to be considered and require further research. It was also made clear to us by participants that we need to find ways to continue the journey. When we asked participants which themes they felt they had neglected in their lives, all participants felt there was still “work” to do on the search for self, happiness, tolerance and uncertainty but saw this realistically as part of their ongoing life journey. The seeds are sown, but a growing tree still needs to be nurtured. Finding ways to continue to develop reflexivity by intentionally creating dialogical spaces for deeper reflection over time is important.

Additionally, depending on the educational programme and whether the aim is to take reflexive practitioners a step further and to actively encourage social entrepreneurship, social justice and equity; the “performance” aspect of the model offers this possibility. Brown

(2004, 96) in her research in the United States on developing transformative leaders highlights the “necessity of action based on reflection,” stressing Freire’s (1994) point that reflection alone does not result in change. Brown (2004) advocates increasing learners’ awareness of selves as ‘agents of change’ through, for example, community-based learning, or by encouraging learners to make ‘activist action plans’ which involve making decisions on relevant social issues, developing practical strategies to solve them, and examining the ramifications of action versus inaction. The module itself is linked to a community-based project which strengthens the “action” aspect of social performance. This is envisaged as part of the critically reflexive process in the performance loop of the model; however, this aspect was apparent in the data mainly from only two of the participants. One participant found himself becoming more involved in his community, and another expressed her values specifically in terms of empowerment. There is, therefore, potential to develop this aspect of performativity further, moving beyond contextual understandings which involves following a more holistic approach professionally, towards encouraging active engagement in social action. The strong emphasis on the relational outcomes of tolerance and acceptance of others also offers potential for this kind of approach in conflict resolution, diversity training, and social cohesion programmes.

## **6. Conclusion**

Waghid (2009) highlights the importance of cultivating deliberative democracy (sharing commonalities and respecting differences); compassionate imagining (treating others justly and humanely); and cosmopolitan justice (rights for all, including those considered as other) in universities on the African continent. Effective education then needs to favour a dialogical, egalitarian and participative practice that is contextually based within the lived experiences of students. This research shows that when given the opportunity students are more likely to realise their potential through a better understanding and critical reflection of themselves, others, and their social context – bringing together hindsight and foresight to develop better insight as a necessary skill for accountable praxis.

## **References**

- Brady, I. 2009. *Foreword in Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887. Available from <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735>.
- Brown, K. M., 2004. Leadership for Social Justice and Equity: Weaving a Transformative Framework and Pedagogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 40(1): 77-108.
- Bruner, J. (1987). Life as Narrative. *Social Research*. 54(1): 11-32.

- Bryant, L. 2015. Introduction: Taking up the Call for Critical and Creative Methods in Social Work Research. In L Bryant (Ed.), *Critical and Creative Research Methodologies in Social Work*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York.
- Butler-Kisber, L. 2002. Artful portrayals in qualitative inquiry: The road to found poetry and beyond. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research XLVIII*(3): 229-239.
- Charmaz, K. 2012. The Power and Potential of Grounded Theory. *Medical Sociology online* 6(3) 2-15. [www.medicalsociologyonline.org](http://www.medicalsociologyonline.org).
- Cunliffe, A. L. 2004. On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner. *Journal of Management Education* 28(4): 407-426. DOI: 10.1177/1052562904264440.
- Dirkx, J. M. 1998. 'Transformative Learning Theory in the Practice of Adult Education: An overview'. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning* 7: 1-14.
- Fook, J., and Askeland, G. A. (2007). Challenges of Critical Reflection: 'Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained.' *Social Work Education*. 1–14.
- Frank, A.W. 2010. *Letting stories breathe: A Social-Narratology*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (Rev. ed.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1970).
- Gallardo, H. L., Furman, R., and Kulkarni, S. 2009. Explorations of Depression: Poetry and Narrative in Autoethnographic Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Social Work* 8(3): 287-304.
- Gergen, K. J. 2009. *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press.
- Graham, M. J. 2017. *Reflective Thinking in Social Work: Learning from student narratives*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group:
- Gilbert, A., and Slipe, Y. 2009. Reflexivity in the practice of social action: from self-to inter-relational reflexivity. *South African Journal of Psychology* 39(4): 468-479.
- Kroth, M. and Cranton, P. 2014 'Stories of Transformative Learning', *International Issues in Adult Education*. 14 (9).
- Mangadu, T. 2014. Empowering Health Promotion Students on the Texas-Mexico Border Through Digital Storytelling: Implications for Public Health in Vulnerable Communities. *TPHA Journal*. 66(3).
- Merriam, S. and Clarke, M. (1991). Learning from Life Experience: What Makes it Significant. In Michael Langenbach (compiler), *32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma

Merriam, S. and Ntseane, G. 2008. Transformational Learning in Botswana: How Culture Shapes the Process. *Adult Education Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1177/0741713608314087, 1-15.

Mezirow, J. 1997. Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. No. 74. Jossey-Bass Publishers: 5-12.

Mezirow, J. 2009. An overview of transformative learning. In *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning theorists...in their own words*. Editor Knud Illeris. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York. ISBN 0-203-87042-5 Master e-book ISBN.

Norton, L., and Sliap, Y. 2017a. A critical reflexive model: Working with life stories in Health Promotion Education. *Unpublished, Accepted for publication SAJHE 32(2) of 2018*.

Norton, L., and Sliap, Y. 2017b. The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education. *Unpublished, Accepted for publication Qualitative Research in Psychology, 2018*.

Rappaport, J. 1995. Empowerment Meets Narrative: Listening to Stories and Creating Settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 23 (5): 795-807.

Rogers, N. 1993. *The Creative Connection: Expressive arts as healing*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behaviour Books.

Sliap, Y. 2010. Teaching for transformation: The use of narrative metaphor to develop reflexive professionals. *Acta Academica: Teaching of psychology in South Africa: Supplementum 2*: 109-132.

Sliap, Y. and Gilbert, A. 2006. Promoting Inter-Relational Reflexivity with Psychosocial Workers in Community Work: A Case Study from Burundi. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*.(2): 293-302. ISSN 1433-0237.

Sliap, Y., and Kotze, E. 2007. Weaving a learning community by the telling, deconstructing and re-telling of life stories. *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*, 138-150.

Sliap, Y., and Norton, L. 2016. Trees, poems and drama to create reflexive spaces for peace building in schools. In *Peace education for violence prevention in fragile African societies: What's going to make a difference?*, edited by S. Mphahosa, and A. Keasley. Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa.

Waghid, Y. 2009. Universities and Public Goods: In defence of democratic deliberation, compassionate imagining and cosmopolitan justice. In *Higher Education in South Africa*, edited by E. Blitzler. Stellenbosch: Sun Press. DOI: 10.18820/9781920338183/04.

White, S., Fook, J., and Gardner, F. 2006. Critical reflection: a review of contemporary literature and understandings. In *Critical reflection in health and social care*, edited by S. White, and F. Gardner. Maidenhead: Open University Press.



Acknowledgements: Teaching and Learning Grant, University of KwaZulu-Natal, SA. And the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS)

## CHAPTER 5

### STORY OF COMMUNITY PRACTICE

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this phase of the research I applied the concepts of critical reflexivity in a very different way with refugee youth from the DRC, living in Durban, SA. Bringing what I had learnt from my own experience of reflexivity, understanding better the challenges that I experienced but also the benefits, and having seen the benefits of reflexivity in education, I chose to follow a participatory action approach in a community context. I also made a specific choice to work with youth living in SA having done my research masters in HP exploring children's fears and anxieties in a community context ('Nowhere to Hide: An Exploration of Adolescent School Children's Fears and Anxieties in their Communities,' 2013). Findings from my research indicated that children in this country are 'scared' in their communities, especially because of the high levels of violence and other forms of adversity such as poverty and lack of resources, that are present in most SA communities. This research was quantitative in nature, using structured questionnaires, and although it gave interesting (and shocking in relation to the high levels of fear and anxiety experienced by children) results, the impact of the research was not felt in any beneficial way by the participants. In reflecting on this as I was embarking on my PhD and through my reflexive work, I wanted to make different choices – to include participants as much as possible in the research and to follow the 'intervention' route in the hope that researching *together* meant that youth could be involved and play key roles in research about 'their' lives. Participatory action research has been defined as a "research paradigm in which the researcher's function is to serve as a resource to those being studied – usually disadvantaged groups – to empower them to act effectively in their own interest" (de Vos et al., 2011, p.492). Focusing on participants as experts of their own lives and as agents capable of solving their own problems and transforming their lives (de Vos, et al, 2011), is in keeping with a reflexive life story methodology involving facilitating a platform for participants to share experiences, to tell and witness each other's stories, and to consider possibilities for moving forward and looking for shared solutions.

In this context, reflexivity plays a more 'behind-the-scene' role in the sense that participants are not specifically 'taught' critical reflexivity and the academic terminology is not used. Instead a reflexive approach was used as a basis, along with storytelling, to structure the intervention to focus on developing a sense of agency and 'voice' for participants by better understanding their stories and exposing moments of strength to build individual and group identity and hope. This was found to be especially necessary with refugee youth who not only experience the 'usual' hardships apparent in SA communities, but also those that come from their experiences as refugees. Again, there is a link to the HP masters at UKZN, as the gatekeeper for this project, himself a refugee from the DRC, was also part of the HP masters in 2013, and shared his story of hardship and bravery at that time. This was in

sharp contrast to my story of privilege, and, as with many of the other stories that were shared during our time together, opened a window into an-other life.

## **5.2 Story of Practice: Participatory action research with refugee youth**

**Paper 5** – Norton & Sliep #WE SPEAK: Exploring the experience of refugee youth through participatory research and poetry to facilitate voice

**#WE SPEAK: Exploring the experience of refugee youth through participatory  
research and poetry**

Lynn Norton & Yvonne Sliep

**Abstract**

Despair and a sense of hopelessness have been uninvited fellow travelers for many refugees. The harsh reality of living in a foreign country makes it difficult for even the most resilient. Despite the myriad challenges facing refugee populations there are numerous barriers to accessing services in a South African context. This is especially true for refugee youth who often fall through the gap. This paper explores the benefits of following a narrative, reflexive approach to participatory research with refugee youth living in Durban, South Africa. We conducted a series of workshops with a focus on creating safe dialogical spaces, identity and values, agency, social connection and performativity using a Critical Reflexive Framework. What emerged early in the research was a sense of despair due to daunting structural obstacles and xenophobia, making life stressful and unsafe for refugee teenagers. This was coupled with feelings of hopelessness in a future lacking in possibilities. When these feelings are not dealt with it can result in psychological distress and involvement in a range of antisocial behaviours. However, by following a strength based methodology in creative interventions to re-member abilities, opportunities can be created for hope and agency. The experience is explored through the voices of participants using narrative dialogical analysis and poetic inquiry.

**Key words:** refugee youth, narrative, reflexive, dialogical, poetry, participatory research

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to explore the benefits of following a narrative, reflexive and participatory research approach with youth from a low resource, refugee community from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) living in South Africa (SA). The research is part of a wider project focussed on the value of critical reflexivity and the facilitation of dialogical spaces in education and community practice at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), SA. Refugee populations are particularly marginalised and experience numerous barriers to access their rights and essential services including: cultural and language barriers, prioritising of resettlement stressors, distrust of authority, and prejudice and stigma. In a South African context the politics of belonging for immigrants and refugees are particularly complex due to its apartheid history and unequal socio-economic conditions resulting in high levels of xenophobia, including waves of violent attacks, against non-nationals that have now been well documented (Mosselson, 2010; Rugunanan and Smit 2011, Solomon and Kosaka 2014). Despite numerous hardships, the voices of teenagers are seldom taken into account in studies exploring the experiences of refugees and intervention programmes that promote positive outcomes are deemed essential (Ellis, Miller, Baldwin and Abdi 2011).

The initial research team for this project consisted of a PhD student (first author) and professor (second author) from the Health Promotion and Communication programme at UKZN who have a special interest in developing critical reflexivity and agency through the facilitation of dialogical spaces using a mix of creative methodologies in education and community contexts. We were supported in the research by a master's student (herself a refugee) and by the gatekeeper of the project who is a long-standing member of the DRC

community, both of whom became integral members of the research team and enabled us to build a trusting relationship with the youth participants. Previous community workshops and research had been conducted by researchers from UKZN on the request of the gatekeeper after sharing his own story as a student during his master's, highlighting the challenges he has endured in his past and continues to face as a refugee living in the Point area of Durban, SA. However, these had been conducted principally with adults, and it became clear over time that there had been no opportunities provided for teenagers, who tend to fall through the gap, in the area to share their experiences. The principal aim of the research was to facilitate such an opportunity by providing a safe space and a participatory process to invite youth from the community, through the gatekeeper, to share their experiences with outsider witnesses. As researchers we wanted to better understand the lives of refugee youth from their own point of view, but primarily it was important for the youth themselves to better understand their own socio-cultural contexts. We conducted a series of five participatory intervention workshops with 21 teenage participants, both male and female. The workshops took place in a local community hall which was a familiar and safe setting for community members, specifically refugees, and food, beverages and a small disbursement for travel or other expenses were provided. Our hope was that through a reflexive exploration carried out in a supportive environment involving participants sharing their histories through life stories, their current life challenges, and their aspirations that space would be created to develop personal and collective agency and for local solutions to emerge.

Following a narrative approach that is dialogical and reflexive means that particular attention is paid to the facilitation and strengthening of voice, agency and social connection through the sharing of stories. This, in turn, means that there is a privileging of context and community and the voices of marginalised groups and individuals are brought to the fore. In

this way participants become part of the co-construction of knowledge and contribute towards preferred outcomes for a more just society (Sliep 2010). The researchers also focused on using strength-based and creative methodologies to re-member abilities and strengths from the past and present to create opportunities for building positive identities and hope for the future. To evaluate the process we tracked participants' movements from a position of hopelessness and despair which was revealed in the first workshop to one of personal and collective strength that grew over time as the workshops progressed.

The results of the study are presented following a narrative dialogical analysis, with poetic inquiry, to express our findings through the words of the participants. The voices of the teenagers are brought to the fore through their own poetry and the researchers' *found* poetry based on the actual words of participants expressed during the workshops. The poetry is used to reveal the narrative surrounding the participants' hardships and daily stressors as expressed in the first workshop, and their experiences of participating in the research, revealing both personal and collective outcomes. In this article we use a critical reflexive lens to focus particularly on the shifts in the participants' experience of the research process through the workshops. Due to space constraints, a more in depth analysis of youth life experience is beyond the scope of this paper but forms part of the ongoing research.

### **Teen challenges in the South African context: Hardship and Xenophobia**

There is much concern generally that the hardships experienced by youth in South Africa through a myriad contextual factors (for example: violent neighbourhoods, low performing schools, dysfunctional families) will lead to a generation of youth who do not know how to deal with their problems other than through violence and anti-social behaviour

(Ward, Dawes and Matzopoulous 2012). South African society at large is marked by past injustice, poverty and unequal opportunities that greatly contribute towards child vulnerability in this country (Seedat et al. 2009). As a result youth and children in South Africa are affected by a great number of hardships, including death, disease and violence at a very high rate and on an ongoing basis (Burton and Leoschut 2013, Foster, Kuperminc and Price 2004, Seedat, et al. 2009, Shields, Nadasen and Pierce 2008). Middle school children who are now growing up in the post-apartheid era are faced with an array of difficulties including poverty, violence, multicultural and multilingual challenges, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Burkhardt 2007). Consequently youth are subjected to multiple daily stressors that can affect their psychological and physical functioning (Barbarin and Richter 1999).

Although there is little literature on refugee youth in the South African context specifically, the challenges outlined above would apply also to this community which is generally characterised by a number of social, economic and psychological challenges. A study of the challenges facing Congolese and Burundian refugees in Pretoria, SA, highlights the persistent worries about daily survival among a group of men and women. Issues such as the need for shelter and food, protection against crime and ongoing threats of xenophobia were stressed together with obstacles to making a living, including language barriers, difficulties with documentation, and the need to live in the inner-city in poor conditions because of xenophobia and discrimination (Rugunanan and Smit 2011). Where such heavy burdens are borne by parents or guardians they will clearly also be experienced by the children of refugees, manifesting in different and complex ways. A lack of resources and opportunity for parents that results in living in poverty affects the whole family. Poverty is viewed by Ratele (2007) not just in terms of little or no income but as a multidimensional concept that relates also to access to resources, opportunities to participate in communities,



and living conditions. Poverty or neighbourhood socioeconomic status has been shown to cause a myriad challenges including hunger, disease, unsafe and poor living conditions which impact a child's development, safety and sense of wellbeing (Ward 2007).

In the global literature on refugee youth it has been found that the life experiences of youth displaced by war are diverse and often very different depending on the course of their migration (Ensor 2013). While all teenagers face change as they grow up to become adults, refugee youth living in a new country face challenges over and above the *usual* experiences, often taking on additional roles within the family. These may include helping with language and support with siblings or employment. These obligations may lead to positive outcomes, such as self-worth, or in many cases to stressful negative effects (Guruge et al. 2015).

Further, a high degree of trauma is experienced by many adolescent refugees and mental health outcomes may range from persistent problems to resiliency (Ellis et al. 2011). The experience of refugee youth is consequently multi-layered but at the same time cannot be separated from their background and experiences of migration (themselves or their parents), consequent economic burdens, and often hostile policies and public opinions. Such a history and context frequently leads to otherness and creates 'boundaries of belonging' (Morrice 2013, 665). This plays out not only between the youth and citizens of their host country, but inter-generational conflict is also common when children have access to different educational and other experiences that are not present in the country of origin (Ensor 2013). In South Africa, the challenges faced by refugees are exacerbated by the xenophobic violence that is part of the landscape for foreigners (Mosselson 2010, Rugunanan and Smit 2011, Solomon and Kosaka 2014).

## **Researching with Youth: Facilitating Voice and Agency through Participatory Action Research**

Researching youth experience is considered both complex and important (Greene and Hill 2005). In all matters pertaining to youth, focus should be on their own perspectives and views to understand what their priorities are and how they interpret their context. Only then is it possible to ensure that youth are empowered and enabled to safeguard their own human rights (Hill 2005). The voices of refugee youth living in South Africa are particularly marginalised and *quiet* and the aim of this research was to find a way to facilitate a platform for their voices to be heard. For this reason we chose to follow a participatory action research (PAR) approach in terms of which the researcher acts as a resource to empower participants to transform their own lives (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont 2011). Such an approach is relevant in a reflexive narrative investigation which recognises that each individual or group is/are the experts of their own lives. In this sense PAR focuses on participants as ‘active agents in the process of creating knowledge, reaching a collective objective and solving problems’ (de Vos, et al. 2011, 493). In line with this the workshops adopted strategies that focused on strength-based outcomes and shared solutions. They were adapted each week according to what we were hearing in dialogue with participants. The aim of the research was not only to collect data on the experiences of refugee youth but also to explore the potential transformative effects of following such an approach in enabling voice and shifting perceptions from hopelessness towards self-belief and agency.

*Voice* has been described as the capacity to speak up and be heard, from homes to houses of parliament, and to shape and share in discussions, discourse and decisions (WB report 2014). Giving voice to participants in all research, particularly with youth, is

considered important. In PAR, where transformative outcomes become possible, voice can be seen as an expression of agency. Through sharing life stories there is an acknowledgement of voice, and the right to be heard, which is especially important for those who are socially excluded (Suarez-Ortega 2013). Rappaport (1995) has linked narrative studies and empowerment by highlighting the importance of privileging the voices of research participants for engendering personal and social change. Having a voice and being able to tell your story while being able to impact collective stories, is considered an empowering activity and a powerful resource (Rappaport 1995). It also connects with those *outside*, helping us to see into the world of the participant and understand it better.

Empowerment has been viewed as a ‘process of change’ in terms of which people who have been ‘denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability’ (Kabeer 1999, 437). However, the ability to make choices is not as simple as implied when considerations of power are taken into account. Kabeer (1999) understands choice in this sense in terms of three inter-related dimensions: resources (pre-conditions, not just material but also social); agency (process) and achievements (outcomes) (437). She further describes agency as the ‘ability to define one’s goals and act upon them’ but says that this includes more than ‘observable’ action but ‘encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense of agency*’ (438). Kabeer (1999) also extends the forms that agency can take beyond just decision-making to include forms ranging from negotiation to manipulation and the ability to analyse and reflect. It is this dimension of empowerment and broad view of agency with an underlying purpose that requires a process that links decision-making and choices to lived experience. Denborough (2014) emphasises that it is not the ‘facts’ of our lives that we can change, but their ‘meanings’ and our perceptions of

ourselves, '[a]nd if the story we tell about ourselves changes, it will influence what becomes possible for us in the future' (21).

The multidimensional nature of agency is also explored by Samman and Santos (2009) who look at the various indicators of agency and empowerment in terms of Rowlands' (1997) empowerment framework: *power over* (resisting manipulation), *power to* (creating new possibilities), *power with* (acting in a group), and *power from within* (enhancing self-respect and self-acceptance). Of important consideration in working with life stories is an intertwining of these different dimensions to facilitate a capability of working from a strength-based perspective. Through storytelling it is important to identify the strengths, skills and steps people are taking in various aspects of their everyday lives or have taken in the past to develop new perspectives on their identity and meaning in their lives (Denborough 2014).

Agency, as described by Bandura (2001) is seen as enabling people to play a part in their adaption, self-development and self-renewal. 'To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions' (Bandura 2001, 2). The core features he identifies are intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. Overall, what is of importance in a practical sense is that actions rooted in agency are potentially more sustainable as they are well-grounded. 'Goals, rooted in a value system and sense of personal identity, invest activities with meaning and purpose' (Bandura 2001, 8). Bandura (2001) also stresses the importance of efficacy, beliefs, and a sense of control, as a foundation to personal agency and a major influence on personal development and choice behaviour. In his view: 'Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs in their capability to exercise some measure of control over their own function and

over the environmental events' (10). These features are intertwined with the characteristics of storytelling – coherence, sense of control and meaning – and the dimensions of the Critical Reflexive Model on which the research is based (*details below*) relating to understanding power and developing a better sense of identity related to your values.

### **Staying with the Story: A Critical Reflexive Lens within the Narrative Paradigm**

Following a reflexive, narrative approach meant that it was important to listen to the stories and voices of the youth. Stories are viewed as tools for living that enable one to reflect and therefore to better understand, negotiate and create; leading to potential transformation on both a personal and social level (Suarez-Ortega 2013). This is because stories are social and considered essential for individual and collective sense-making (Squire 2013). Sharing stories amidst others, opens space for deconstructing and exploring life's challenges and aspirations in a relational and contextual way. This adds to the common body of knowledge of the group, and opens connections for new possibilities and creative solutions.

A Critical Reflexive Model (Sliep and Norton 2016) provided the backbone of this research, both as a framework for facilitating reflexivity and agency among participants and for a critical examination of the data gathered during the workshops. Reflexivity in this sense refers to an increased ability to understand how meaning is shaped and how our actions are formed by and from the world (Gilbert and Sliep 2009). This is important for both researchers and participants. The model centres on the importance of creating a dialogical space in which participants are able to safely share their stories; and a continuous and open dialogue is facilitated among participants and between the researchers and participants.

Telling and witnessing stories in such a space aids in both self-appraisal and an appraisal of the self as a participant of collective action (Gilbert and Sliep 2009). Deconstructing individual and collective stories, in turn, can lead to the development of self and relational reflexivity, increased critical consciousness, contextual savvy, agency and social performativity (Sliep 2010). Such a process is aided when viewed as an iterative and continuous process that focuses on four aspects outlined by the model: understanding power and breaking down the effect of dominant discourses in your life; identifying values and building a positive identity; facilitating agency by focusing on personal strengths; and accountable social performance (Sliep and Norton 2016). See Fig. 1.

The model, which views narrative theory within an ecological framework, embraces stories within their context and enables participants to critically reflect on meaning in both their own lives and the lives of others. The experience is relational as it becomes clear that meaning is formed from social interactions with others, opening the space for participants (and researchers) to listen to alternative framings of reality and to question their own intentions and assumptions (Gilbert and Sliep 2009). In this way it aids in developing reflexive skills and provides a ‘map to show where agency is played out’ as understanding is integrated into the lived experience of participants. Further, reconstructing preferred individual and collective stories throughout the process helps lead to accountable action (Sliep 2010, 115).

### Narrative paradigm in reflexivity framework

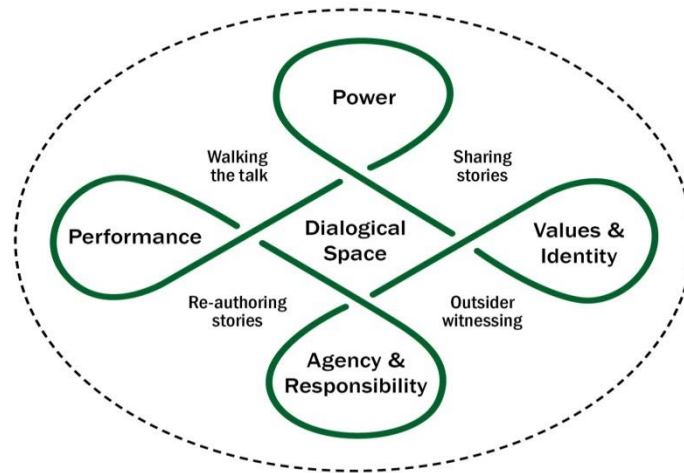


Fig 1: Narrative perspective in Critical Reflexive Framework – From: Sliep and Norton 2016

Life-narratives are believed to be an important vehicle for the realisation of agency in one's life in terms of an ecological view of agency as something that is not merely possessed but achieved 'through the active engagement of individuals with aspects of their contexts-for-action' (Biesta and Tedder 2007, 132). Developing an ability to critique the status quo and play a more active role to position oneself augments the agency of both the individual and the group (Sliep 2010). When priority is given to the participants' subjective consciousness through life stories, it highlights that meaning is constructed, and can therefore be re-structured (Suarez-Orega 2013); opening gaps for looking at preferred stories and changing outcomes. Further, both micro aspects which are directly a part of participants' lives and macro aspects involving the larger cultural, social, political and economic context come into play when life stories are shared (Suarez-Orega 2013). This ties well with an ecological perspective which is considered imperative for looking at youth development within context to take into account the interaction between the individual and the environment in which he or she lives (Bronfenbrenner 1993, O'Connor and Lubin 1984).

## **Building Positive Outcomes: Creative Methodologies to Open Dialogue**

The workshops involved facilitating a safe, dialogical platform for participants to share experiences in the context of their own lives and to consider possibilities for moving forward and looking for shared solutions. This was done through a number of experiential embodied exercises including using drama, songs, poetry, sharing stories, using a *tree of life* and body mapping. Working with lives full of hardships or in a turmoil has been likened to working with individuals or groups swimming in a fast flowing river full of dangers in which all efforts are needed for focusing on survival. In such cases it is considered necessary to develop what Caleb Wakhungu has called a ‘riverbank’ position, ‘a way to step out of the turmoil and the fast-flowing water and up onto the riverbank, where we can then look down upon our own life’ (in Denborough 2014, 310). Using the Tree of Life or journey of life as a metaphor for talking about life experiences and storytelling is considered a way to do this and has been used in many contexts to bring about changes to the way people are able to view their lives, increasing possibilities for the future (Denborough 2014). Storytelling can also be used as a base for dialogue, connecting people to each other and to their lived experience. Social dialogue and shared conversations between people in reflexive relationship enables movement from an individual to a more collective understanding and shared meaning (Bohm 1996).

Using expressive arts such as song, drama, or poetry as tools in sharing stories can help reveal deeper meanings within the shared experiences (Brady 2009, Gallardo, Furman and Kularni 2009). Poetry has been found to be an especially effective way of expressing and exploring lived experience (Richardson 1993). Body maps, life-size body images drawn



by participants to symbolise the self, are considered a creative process allowing participants to reveal more about themselves in a manner that is not confrontational, breaks down power, and helps youth explore the meaning of their experiences (Magalhaes and Galheigo 2014). This range of creative methodologies was used to tap into the subconscious and to grow a deeper understanding of the participants' shared experiences. Using narrative and visual methods has been found useful in exploring the lived experiences of migrant groups in southern Africa, as they importantly offer not only a platform for including participants in the production of knowledge, but also create opportunities to "engage in the 'feel' of events and the lives of participants" (Oliveira and Vearey 2017, 3). Fox (2015) asserts that artistic embodied methodologies within PAR can be used as valuable tools for generating new knowledge and make meaning that is not "flattened" or "distorted" especially in relation to under-represented or oppressed experiences. This is especially so in contrast to positivist approaches that focus on objective rather than subjective experiences which can often misrepresent what participants actually feel and experience. In this sense, making use of a mix of creative methodologies that are more representative of participants lived experiences can add to the validity of the research as it "provides a praxis for theorizing collectively" (Fox 2015, 326). Fox and Fine (2012) in considering participatory youth studies in New York city, highlight the importance of methodology that sparks the imagination and found that there was "power in play;" and that increased creativity opens the way for increased collaboration and deeper and new insights among participants (20). During this research we found that the creative methodology in itself worked as an intervention to reduce stress and to engender creative voice with and by participants.

The research also involved a number of dialogical interviews and focus groups with open, probing questions to more deeply explore participants' experiences and their

perceptions of the research. A mix of methods has proved useful as all provide important data, including the more conventional methods such as interviews and focus groups, which are then enriched by artistic representations to better capture the complexity of migration and the experience of refugees (Guruge et al. 2015). The process was reflexive and organic in keeping with a PAR and narrative approach in recognition that we (the researchers) were not the experts and needed to listen and enter the research with an openness to new understandings (Evans 2016).

Staying with the story in this way was not a static process and in terms of the Critical Reflexive Model meant that we were moving through the loops interactively as a way to open pathways for strengthening and re-authoring preferred stories that facilitate voice and agency. Reflexivity is developed as the effect of dominant discourses are broken down; identity and personal values are strengthened; and a growing sense of agency becomes rooted through a better understanding of lived and shared experience. Performance then becomes possible based on *power from within* the self and *power with* the group. Performance or transformative outcomes are often not the same for different individuals or different groups, and although the focus here is largely on augmented agency, this is viewed broadly in terms of an array of positive outcomes that are believed to be triggered by developing reflexivity. Such outcomes could include increased critical awareness of self and others in context; increased psychological capital (a more positive psychological state which may show differently in participants, for example, increased self-confidence for some, and optimism for others); stronger social capital (a more developed supportive network); and social justice (a shift in perspectives from individual to social outcomes through interconnectivity and increased relational reflexivity). In this way we hoped participants would find ways to move towards possibilities for them to perform into their own power on their own terms.

One of the aims of narrative research is to understand how stories influence behaviour and identity, personal and social change, and how community narratives and personal stories interact and affect each other (Rappaport 1995). Rappaport (1995) links such an approach to the goals of empowerment which is particularly relevant with PAR and means that the researcher needs to listen to and give value to the stories of the participants, helping them 'to discover their own stories, create new ones, and develop settings that make such activities possible' (796). This analysis hopes to value the stories told by exploring and revealing the participants lived experience in their voices (how they spoke about themselves and their social context), and to evaluate whether the research process itself led to positive outcomes or agency (have new stories been created?). We therefore followed a dialogical narrative interpretation of the data gathered in the workshops, using poetic inquiry as described by the authors (*see* Norton and Slied 2017) and adapted to suit the current data. This choice is made as we view stories as *actors* in and of themselves (Frank 2010). The stories shared by participants then would be active in constructing identities, making meaning, building connections and encouraging change (Riessman 2008).

The analysis was conducted throughout the research, it was continuous and evolving as themes and patterns emerged from each of the workshops. The dialogical nature of the analysis means that the research is carried out *with* participants and is not just *about* them (Frank 2010). Over the five workshops a variety of methods, as detailed below, were used to dialogue and gather data, each building on the last to re-check that we were *staying with the story* and to go to deeper levels of understanding. The narrative analysis is initiated by asking a number of critical questions to listen for contextual influences. This was done based on the Critical Reflexive Framework. Further, using expressive arts in PAR and in the analysis, especially

*voice* and *found* poetry’ opens the way to hear the *actual* voices of the research participants, rather than just re-telling the stories of participants.

‘Found’ poetry also referred to as *Vox Participare (the voices of the participants)* is used to bring the researcher close to the data by drawing on the arts and, like narrative inquiry, does this to ‘more authentically express human experiences’ (Prendergast 2009, xxxvi). In creating this poetry the co-authors, in dialogue with each other, worked with the transcribed words of the participants from group discussions, presentations and exercises during the action research to pull together threads and patterns revealed in the data. We listened for both the repetition of themes that emphasized the group’s experience, and individual voices that revealed more unique experiences. In writing the poetry these are brought together, using the actual words of the participants, to represent narratives or excerpts of the participants’ experience. In awareness of our own contribution in constructing the poems, they were written throughout the research process, between each workshop, so that we could feedback the poetry in the following workshop and “check-in” with participants. The poems were often used to engender more discussion and dialogue, and a selection was read out during a community psychology conference (*see below*), in which the researchers and a group of participants shared in presenting the research to an international audience. Many of the poems, and new ones generated by the teenagers, have also been shared at a feedback event with parents and guardians and, in addition, will be published on a community website which is under construction to further render visible participants voices. Notwithstanding, our interpretations offered below are not final and remain open for continued dialogue.

## **Workshop 1: *Coming to South Africa, Hardship Times...***

The researchers approached the first workshop from a position of *not-knowing* and invited participants to speak about their own experiences and challenges. A number of themes immediately became apparent as participants shared parts of their lives: prejudice (xenophobia, hate, racism); silence and fear linked to xenophobia (lack of safety, picked on for being foreign, fights, cannot speak own language in public spaces); violence (gangsterism, fighting, crime); peer pressure (drugs, smoking, bad friends); a lack of resources (money problems, food, clothes, school fees); and hopelessness in the future (*even if we try hard, can't go anywhere, there is nothing we can do, no change*). The latter is aptly summed up by the participants' observation that if there is not even work for South African youth, what chance to they stand. Overall, the researchers observed a sense of hopelessness and despair. This is best expressed in the words of the participants themselves as captured in a narrative poem woven from their conversations during the initial focus groups:

### *Hardship Times*

*Coming to South Africa, hardship time  
High school, education, grade 10, matric  
Hard work and determination, having fun  
I dream,*

*I actually want to become somebody in life  
we need education,  
so we can focus on a good life*

*But, even if we do well at school, it is impossible for us  
Even if we study, we still won't get a job  
The nature of the country, Zuma, empty promises*

*Even if we try hard, we can't go anywhere  
Gangsterism, crime, in and out of school  
Effects us all  
We don't feel safe anywhere, except at church and home  
Feel scared*

*I was robbed, my shoulder injured  
I was attacked, there were 10 of them*

*Feel angry*

*There was fighting, in the street, just outside the school  
Fighting everywhere, especially with refugees*

*Feel sad*

*We are easily betrayed by our South African friends  
As soon as our backs are turned  
Bring us down*

*Xenophobia and hatred, in and out of school – its racism*

*We get called makwerekwere – its racism  
We are mukimbizi – people who have travelled  
people who are foreign – its racism*

*We try to ignore*

*It works for a while*

*But, sometimes, you need to fight*

*Only options, run or fight*

*At any time need to be ready for a fight, run or fight  
Self-protection, self-defence*

*The police are racist too  
Always blame the foreigners  
It is always  
Our fault*

*There was fighting, in school  
I got a transfer card  
Which means I have to leave  
And find another school  
It is impossible to find another school  
I am no longer at school*

*No jobs, sometimes part time*

*No programmes, dealing with xenophobia  
Peer pressure*

*force you to start smoking, do drugs  
the area we are living in – crime, drugs  
they smoke right there where you are  
puts you in a DEEP HOLE  
There is nothing we can do*

*We cannot speak*

*We must be silent  
In taxi's, in the market, we cannot speak on our phones  
In public  
In most places we need to be silent, so no-one knows  
you are a foreigner  
effects all parts of our lives*

*I don't know what I can change  
There has been no change  
Since I arrived*

[Narrative found poem: Workshop 1: Interactive focus group discussion]

The feelings displayed above can be juxtaposed against the needs and wants of the group as displayed in the word cloud below [Fig. 2]. These words and phrases were gathered from participants following a trust building exercise in terms of which participants work in groups to make a nest safe enough to hold an egg and stop it from breaking. Discussion involves what participants need to feel safe enough to share their stories and is part of the process of purposely facilitating a safe dialogical space. This is very different from participants' actual experiences in their daily lives: trust vs hate; non-judgement vs prejudice; help vs fear.



Fig. 2: Word Cloud from trust exercise Workshop 1

A brief analysis of the research process in terms of the Critical Reflexive Framework is summarised below [Fig. 3].

<b>WORKSHOP 1</b>	<b>OPENING THE DIALOGUE: YOUTH EXPERIENCES</b>
Dialogical Space	Purposely facilitated, focus on building trust
Power	Sense of powerlessness – overriding themes: hopelessness, despair and silence
Identity & Values	Identity as refugees, perceived by self and others as foreign
Agency	No sense of agency – ‘ <i>there is nothing we can do</i> ’
Performance	Helplessness, tied to lack of agency – ‘ <i>no change</i> ’ since arrival in SA

Fig. 3: Workshop 1: Analysis in terms of Critical Reflexive Framework

### **Workshop 2: Taking a Step out of the *Deep Hole* of Despair**

Following a narrative methodology meant staying with the story - hearing the voices of despair and hopelessness and looking for ways to tap into the participants’ positive strengths and their own sources of power to counteract what was happening. In the second workshop participants were asked to tell a story of strength from their past and to tie their positive characteristics in with their values and context. Instead of trying to answer the bigger picture, which seems too big to handle, it can be important to move onto the stories of individual strengths to remember your own power so as not to get stuck. This opens the possibility of building hope (reasonable hope) and agency. Exercises included both individual stories, told and embodied through dramas, and looking at group identity (What do you stand for?) based on the logo #We Speak to break the cycles of silence. Individual stories indicated signs of strength and resilience; a re-membering of abilities and incredible courage as depicted in the following poem found in the individual stories of the participants:



## *Courage*

*I walked across four countries, crossing borders  
to South Africa, I helped many others  
women with their children, although  
I was still a child myself*

*At school, I talked in front of everyone  
I am a leader, helpful, honest, smart  
I used my confidence to get a second chance  
I use my intelligence to think things through  
I am a prefect now*

*I am protective, respectful, hardworking, friendly  
I protect my brothers if they are in danger  
Some of us, we live alone, we survive*

*Even when they discouraged me  
I danced and sang before everyone*

[Found poem: Workshop 2: Experiential strength-building exercises including stories, body work and dramas]

Working in small groups the participants' developed logo's to represent themselves based on the question: what do you stand for? The logos were generated from a position of strength and tied to the individual values highlighted through their earlier stories. They are represented below:

## *We Speak*

*We stand for peace  
We stand for love  
We are strong  
Trees in the sun  
If our trunk is cut  
If our branches break  
We will grow again  
We make our own laws  
# New Laws  
# Our voices matter*



Fig 4: Workshop 2: Posters representing group logos: New Laws, Strong Roots, Love, and Peace

The researchers noted a shift in the group. Although outside the room the *bigger picture* remained the same, inside there was a new sense of energy and the idea started to form that some change may be possible [see Fig. 5 below].

<b>WORKSHOP 2</b>	<b>BUILDING IDENTITY AND STRENGTH</b>
Dialogical Space	Sharing stories (telling & witnessing) in a safe space; facilitating voice and social support
Power	Remembering own power & finding hope and strength in selves and group
Identity & Values	Building identities based on values – recognising strength and resilience based on personal attributes, beliefs and past actions
Agency	Starting to build agency through hope, recognition of individual strengths, and power of the group to build self-efficacy and sense of control
Performance	# Our voices matter – Speaking out within the group and developing personal identity as a basis for action

Fig. 5: Workshop 2: Analysis in terms of Critical Reflexive Framework

### **Workshop 3: Another Step Forward - Exploring History, Context and Group Identity**

At the start of workshop three the participants were given T-shirts with the logos they had generated in workshop two to build an identity for the group. They worked together in small groups doing a tree of life exercise, exploring power, and dialoguing about the *new laws* that had come up so often in the exercises. In the hope of facilitating agency it is important to understand that participants can take responsibility and move forward only to the extent of their own power. Further, as stated earlier, agency built on a foundation of firm values and sense of personal identity are more likely to result in sustainable action (Bandura 2001). The workshops represented the building blocks for moving towards a position of agency and performance; with the stories acting to bring meaning, purpose and a sense of control into the lives of participants.

Feedback from participants in this session focused on the need to be heard (*Our voices must be heard, use your voice, I'm loud*); acceptance of others and working together, and *not just looking at the negative but also the good*. Working in groups during the Tree of Life exercise enabled participants to share, talk, and reflect on their context. For the most part, there is the usual teenage discussion – exam stress, peers, playing sports, and wanting careers and happy families. However, the roots and deeper dialogue reveal further the underlying strains which make this group somewhat different from other groups of teenagers, although there is an overall yearning to be treated *all the same*, and the need for equality becomes a major theme in the discussion. Most participants have parents from the DRC and some were born there, experiencing tragedy and great loss as a result of the conflicts in DRC. Many travelled to SA when they were very young or were born in SA and only know the

stories through their parents or guardians but cannot remember their home country. This results in, as one participant describes it, ‘*not really knowing where you belong*’.

The word *xenophobia* starts to come up often in the discussions and the past is heavy in the consciousness of many of the participants. A repeated symbol is of a heart broken stitched together with the words *broken by hate but brought back by love*. There is a history that cannot be ignored despite the resilience and courage in carrying on like usual that was displayed in the previous workshop. This is highlighted by the following poem which portrays the feelings of alienation felt by the group, including those born in South Africa, knowing no other country:

*born there in **DRC***  
*too much **war***  
*going on*  
*too much **blood***  
*shed*  
*came here*  
*I was **four***  
*some of us **born here***  
*can't remember*  
*our **home country***  
*we are the same*  
*live here together*  
*treated different*  
*don't feel **safe***  
*not really knowing*  
*where **we belong***  
*we must live*  
*here*  
*should not*  
*cut this country*  
*in two*

[Found poem: Workshop 3]



Fig. 6: Tree of Life, symbols of New Laws, extract on xenophobia from group poster

The need for equality, fairness, respect and love becomes focal and is symbolised by the group's desire for new laws – a new way of doing things. These new laws appear to stand for many things including new generations, new thinkers (*new law is us, we are the new laws*), freedom, love, unity, respect, they are laws that will benefit all equally, 'so no one got power over anyone.' Discussion on the new laws reveal a number of ways in which these laws can be used to fight inequality and xenophobia ranging from bloodshed and revenge to connection and uniting through love. This opens the way to critically reflect on issues of power and responsibility. In the following workshop it is revealed that the New Laws is also a gang formed by the *foreign boys* that many of the male participants are part of (7 from the group of 21). The dialogue becomes more open as trust develops over the span of the workshops and the researchers are brought more closely into the picture, although with some reservation still with some participants indicating that they do not like the term *gang* and

stressing that it was started for protection and for social activities. Are these socially desirable responses or a growing concern with following a more prosocial path?

<b>WORKSHOP 3</b>	<b>TRACING HISTORY AND CONTEXT</b>
Dialogical Space	Safe space to dialogue, reflect on context (past, present, future)
Power	Deconstructing power: Linking power to responsibility, power for own destructive purposes (eg. revenge) vs wanting to use power positively
Identity & Values	Start to identify as a group – accepting, understanding, working together
Agency	Sharing opinions, challenging old laws (status quo), increased ability to self-reflect so that future options become more possible
Performance	Looking back to enable forward movement, connecting to values and a stronger meaning and purpose

Fig. 7: Workshop 3: Analysis in terms of Critical Reflexive Framework

#### **Workshop 4: Mapping Effects and Standing Together**

Workshop four involved body mapping exercises and an embodied expression by the group of their identity through songs, poems and drama's. The body mapping and group posters reveal once again that this is and isn't your usual teenage group. Once again family, school, peers, sports, careers and hopes for a better future are all parts of the poster and, in fact, compose the larger part of the posters. However, there are many signs of strain and hardship, a crying eye, a broken heart, a knife and stab wound (*see* Fig. 8 below). Out of the teenage hopes and dreams and daily stressors about school and friends come the following lines:

*got stabbed in the head*  
*we have to fight back*  
*when violence comes, we can also do violence*  
*us foreigner boys we call ourselves New Laws*  
*you must be realistic*  
*you can't cry forever, what happened happened*  
*just try to overcome obstacles*  
*beaten by hate, repaired by love*

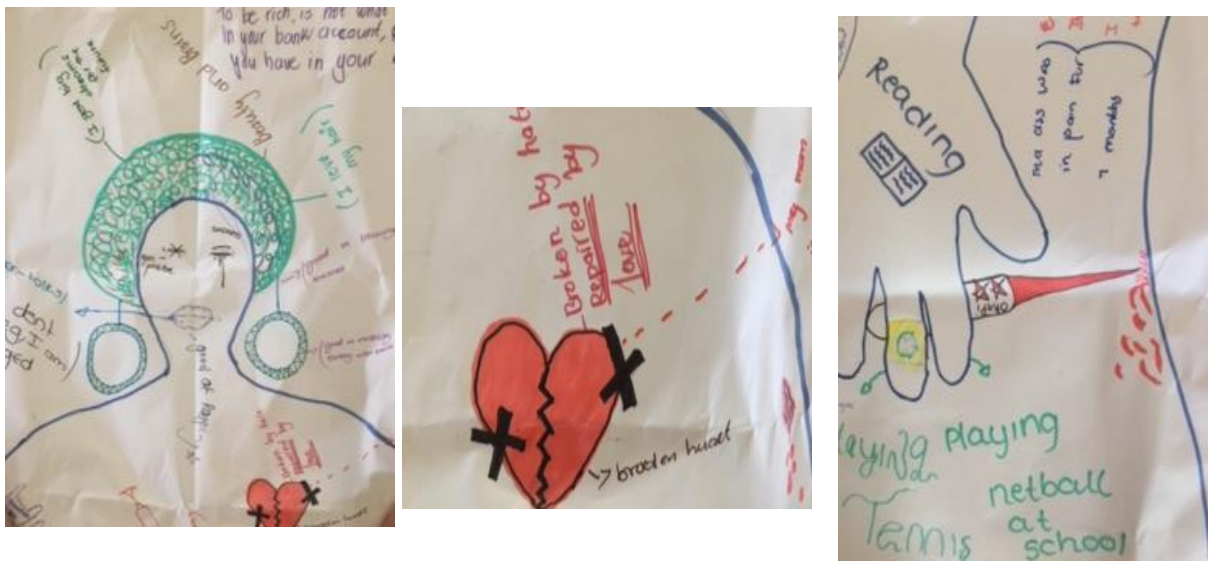


Fig. 8: Workshop 4: Body mapping

The participants work in groups to embody their reflections of what they stand for. The group identity is strong: *we love each other and care for each other; ready to die for this group*. There is a clear indication that this is necessary as a result of the participants' experiences of being treated differently by South Africans because they are foreign. For the males this is expressed through fighting and being bullied physically, and for the females it is often through been talked about, put down, or betrayed by their South African friends. For the participants who speak their home language, this is not recommended in public spaces (on taxi's, in the market) as this could place you at risk of harm, it may mean that you do not get your change on a taxi, or are labelled *makwerekwere*. These experiences appear to be a

prevalent part of school life and most public spaces. They are captured in the following poem written and presented by one of the participants:

*Why do we fight when we can just fly a kite?  
If we just stop killing, we can have a feeling for each other  
But because of xenophobia, it leading the world to disorder  
Our world is being turned around, when we can just stay in our ground  
If we can stop this childish behaviour, we can make our world a better place for all of us*

[Poem by Participant aged 14: Workshop 4]

The poem below was written by the researchers using the words of the participants from their group presentations. It was written in the form of a pantoum, stressing the strong themes of *togetherness* and *not giving up* despite the many challenges faced. It also represented a new sense of hope (*we are hunters of success*) and that a future was possible especially with support from each other.



*We Stand Together*

*We are always there for one another when days are dark  
We love each other, are ready to die for each other  
We never give up  
What touches one, touches all*

*We love each other, are ready to die for each other  
Because of xenophobia our world is being turned around  
What touches one, touches all  
Why do we fight?*

*Because of xenophobia our world is being turned around  
We can make our world a better place  
Why do we fight?  
We are hunters of success*

*We can make our world a better place  
We never give up  
We are hunters of success  
We are always there for one another when days are dark*

[Found pantoum: Workshop 4 presentations, poetry and songs by participants]

The process of moving through the loops is iterative and no one step can be completed, there is always a going back and forth to develop a more reflexive understanding. There is still the presence of despair, there are still the same problems, but the group is stronger, and the group is *standing together*, increasing a sense of belonging.

<b>WORKSHOP 4</b>	<b>MAPPING EFFECTS AND EMBODIMENT</b>
Dialogical Space	Trust is developing further and there is deeper and more open dialogue capturing some of the more difficult stories
Power	Power found by being in the group, working together, standing together especially when vulnerable
Identity & Values	Strong group identity, values of love and social support. Increased sense of relational understandings
Agency	Connecting to the idea of collective agency – stronger together
Performance	Expression through performance, embodies beliefs and makes sense of belonging (stronger voice)

Fig. 9: Workshop 4: Analysis in terms of Critical Reflexive Framework

### **Workshop 5: Moving Forward Together**

Workshop five was largely evaluative both for participants, to consider what they had learnt and how this could take them forward, and for the researchers to get a sense of the value of the research project. Learnings were expressed through a poetry exercise and are presented through extracts from five poems written by the participants in groups in response to the following questions: What did you learn about yourself and others that you did not know before? Through the poetry we see a strong sense of values that underpins the growing power and agency of the participants; and an emergent understanding of the importance of relational connections.

*I can do it all if I believe in myself  
I have learnt that I must love and care*

*I must understand everyone for who they are  
I have learnt not to judge a book by the cover*

*If we work together  
We can do anything*

*We can speak to each other  
Because we trust each other*

*I've learnt that my opinion counts  
BUT what stood out for me  
Is that love can break through  
Thick walls*

*If we can all focus more on other people  
Rather than ourselves  
We can all speak and not keep our words  
We can let our words out with no fear  
So they can hear us better*

The learnings and the experience of the workshops appear strong and positive, but once again, the structural difficulties remain the same, the prejudice is still *out there*. What happens after the workshops? Will this new found strength last? Or will it melt away under the strain of daily stressors, or when the next participant is called a *bad* name, or one of them or their parents is attacked in xenophobic violence? How long will these voices remain loud? The aim of the workshop was not to make structural changes in the environment as this was, and often is, beyond the scope of the resources at hand. However, during the workshops we emphasized issues that youth were able to respond to differently themselves in anticipation that, with the increased awareness (both self and relational) that many of the participants spoke of, they are now able to respond with more resilience and forethought to the hardships that continue to be a part of their daily lives. For example, finding strength in being together as a group rather than through revenge for xenophobic attacks. Individual, proxy and collective agency was framed and built during this time to bolster not just individual action but also supportive networks that can be called upon during troubled times.

Each participant experienced the workshops in different ways and developed different coping skills – from increased self-confidence to awareness of the value of social support.

Weingarten (2010) distinguishes between hope (an often unattainable feeling for those in great despair) and reasonable hope. The latter is viewed as “actions that one takes” to scaffold a “process of making sense of what exists now in the belief that this prepares us to meet what lies ahead” (p. 7). What we hope is that, by facilitating reflexivity for agency and voice within safe spaces, we are facilitating the building of these scaffolds, however unstable, for participants to be better fortified to face an uncertain future.

As part of the ongoing dialogue with the participants we arranged for a small group to represent themselves at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Community Psychology (2016) and to take their own message to the audience through drama. The theme of xenophobia was chosen by the group and was presented through drama and rap. The dramas depicted various scenes of how xenophobia is played out in their lives. Through video interviews the voices of some of the participants were also heard at a conference in New York (Performing the World 2016). A “taking back” research event was arranged for researchers to share their findings and for participants to share their stories and views with parents and adults in their community. This has opened the way for further dialogue and follow-up plans to be drawn up in support of the youth. Each event adds to the layers of understanding and builds the voices of the youth. The analysis represented here then becomes part of an ongoing dialogical process that requires re-visiting each time that the data is shared. The initial workshops represent the start of a process towards building agency and voice for a marginalised group of youth; the start of a conversation that needs to continue. This is summed up in a short poem written by an unknown participant at the New York conference, a reply and a plea to the group:

*I know what it means not to speak  
Not to belong, not to be known  
You are so brave to keep going  
Please keep going  
Please keep your hearts and hands open, and  
Please keep going, trusting yourself, each other and life*

The challenge then is to keep this process going. In part this is done through continued youth groups within the community; but the longer term effects of such a research project still needs to be determined. In our own reflection, as researchers, we understand that such interventions are not a *fix* but hope that by facilitating safe spaces to share stories there is an increase in reflexive understanding, louder voices from those who have been marginalised and are treated unjustly, and a move towards social change. It becomes clear as well that if there is value in facilitating a dialogical space, there is more value in finding ways to keep these spaces open and continued research on this is required. Evaluation forms completed by the participants indicated an overall positive outlook and stressed the need for *more* but this did not apply to every participant. Some participants indicated that the workshops did not represent anything new and it appeared that it was the *getting together* that was the overriding benefit of organising the gatherings, and a few stressed the need to talk more about *deep stuff* in smaller groups.

A summary of the research process in terms of the Critical Reflexive Framework is set out below (Fig. 10). This represents the researchers' analysis of the overall progression of the group, in a full understanding that the workshops meant different things to different individuals.

Dialogical Space	A safe space was created to build trust and open the space for dialogue. This led to a feeling of support as participants shared experiences more openly over the workshops allowing for deeper connections and increased reflexive understandings. Many participants expressed a need for future workshops where they could continue meeting together. Ongoing youth groups is considered one way of keeping the dialogical space open.
Power	Although structural issues did not change there was an increased sense of personal strength, confidence and an ability to speak out. As individuals in the group connected and trust increased between participants, the group itself became a source of power and in this way could establish more positive ideas of power – power from within and with others (strength), and power to create new possibilities rather than power over others (revenge).
Identity & Values	The research revealed a <i>loss</i> of identity as refugee youth found themselves labelled as <i>foreign</i> and found it difficult to understand where they belonged, especially those who have long been away from their country of origin or were born in SA. Taking a strength-based approach to look at personal values and strengths, and facilitating a strong group identity helped participants re-claim their abilities and power.
Agency & Responsibility	Feelings of strength & power led to a more positive sense of agency and hopefulness as participants gained a sense of control and efficacy. This was expressed through the voice and the ability of participants to speak out about their experiences and challenges. In some cases it was represented by a stronger sense of self and self-confidence ( <i>my opinion counts, I can speak more loudly now</i> ) and in others through identifying with the group ( <i>together we can change the world</i> ).
Accountable Performance	More accountability towards: Self – e.g. <i>I am a strong person, I learned how to love my self and not to destroy my life</i> Others – e.g. <i>I was being prejudiced on other people but now I know their true characters, I did not know how to respect others until I joined the workshop</i> Participants performed into action through song, drama and poetry. The words of the participants are being heard. Embodiment of characteristics such as <i>courage</i> become part of a preferred story and lead to new perspectives of self and others.

Fig. 10: Summary Table: Analysis in terms of Critical Reflexive Framework

## Conclusions: A Transformative Process

We moved, all of us, in different ways from silence to voice.

As researchers, we began from a position of *not-knowing* to developing a better (not complete) understanding of the enormous and complex challenges that refugee youth living in SA are facing. Through conference presentations and research articles we voice our understandings, using the words of participants to stay as close as possible to their stories. This includes highlighting the pervasiveness of xenophobia for this group who are referred to as *makwerekwere* (*slang for people who are foreign*). Will this always be the case? Is *refugee* a label that can never be removed? As researchers we wonder whether this is perpetuated in our work as we too label the participants collectively as refugee youth and highlight differences (even when the similarities with other teenagers may be greater) so that the complexity of their experiences may begin to be understood. *Voice* in this respect is not just about agency but also about informing the world. We feel that it is important too for informing interventions that can lead to more acceptance and social cohesion, especially in schools. We discussed this with the gatekeeper in the project who, as stated earlier, is an adult community member from the DRC, himself a refugee from the DRC who has been living in South Africa for 15 years. He finds the term *refugee stressful* but says that the label is still needed to show that the community is disadvantaged and by highlighting this it is possible to raise more awareness of refugee rights (or the lack of rights in a practical sense). At the time of writing SA experienced another wave of xenophobic attacks, emphasising this need.

For the participants, we noticed a move from hopelessness and despair, an increased awareness of their own personal strengths and the strength of the group. This was expressed through stories, songs, drama and poetry – they are *speaking louder than before*. In recognising the silence and despair in the group there was a need to look at positive identity and to find spaces for personal agency to emerge. When caught in a difficult place you need to create reflexive spaces, support and dialogue to get out of it - to talk and reflect and find your own agency once again. Moving from a position of powerless towards agency requires recognising your own value in terms of your strengths and attributes. In this way it is possible to hold onto reasonable hope and move forward – to take that step out of the *deep hole* of despair. The challenge remains to keep moving beyond the facilitation of short term changes in behaviour and perception and to find way a new way of being – to becoming a reflexive being. This is not easy and requires actively engaging in a dialogical space over time, so that you are able to: re-embody critical awareness; re-member your positioning in your story; re-visit your values and intentions; re-connect with others and your context; and remain ethically accountable to yourself, others and your community.

By listening, witnessing and staying close to the story, the youth felt seen and heard. They grew to understand what their *speak* meant to self and others. The group moved through a process of venting their feelings to realising that the cycles of violence or other forms of antisocial behaviour had to be broken for their own good. The overriding message is clear – the youth are a part of the solution – their opinion counts: # We speak # Our voices matter. There is action in voice, in ‘speaking out’ and finding others to ‘speak with.’ This is especially true for a marginalised group whose concerns and unique experiences often go unheard. Facilitating a dialogical space for participatory research opens the possibility for youth to speak about themselves and for themselves. This is critical for a better



understanding of their experiences and for their own sense of strength and empowerment. Speaking with each other in a safe space also opens opportunities for building social connections with others. Participants found strength through the sharing of stories and creative exercises that revealed the bonds between them and built a sense of solidarity in the group – *we are always there for one another when days are dark*. Encouraging dialogue through creative methodology and intervention is key for participatory research with youth who then are not required to explain themselves, but through embodied creative methods are given a powerful vehicle of expression. There is further to go, and these workshops are only the start of exploring new ways for refugee youth to move forward in their lives, but setting a stage together for becoming more critically reflexive creates the possibility of doing this, even when the odds are stacked against you.

## References

- Bandura, A. 2001. "Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective." *Annual Review Psychology* 52: 1-26.
- Barbarin, O. A. and L. Richter. 1999. "Adversity and psychosocial competence of South African children." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 69(3), 319-327.
- Biesta, G. and M. Tedder. 2007. "Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective." *Studies in the Education of Adults* 39(2), 132-149.
- Bohm, D. 1996. *On Dialogue*. Edited by Lee Nichol. London: Routledge.
- Brady, I. 2009. "Foreword." In Prendergast, M., Leggo, C., & Sameshima, P. (Eds.) *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. 1993. "Ecological models of human development." In Gauvain, M., & Cole, M. (Eds.) *Readings on the development of children, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* p. 37-43. New York: Freeman.

- Burkhardt, K. 2007. *An assessment instrument for fear in middle childhood South African children* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/1147>
- Burton, P. and L. Leoschut. 2013. *School Violence in South Africa: Results of the 2012 National School Violence Study*. Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention.
- De Vos, A. S., H. Strydom, C. B. Fouche and C. S. L. Delport. 2011. *Research at Grass Roots: For the social sciences and human service professions*. (Fourth Edition). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Denborough, D. 2014. *Retelling the stories of our lives: Everyday Narrative Therapy to Draw Inspiration and Transform Experience*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Ellis, B. H., A. B. Miller, H. Baldwin, and S. Abdi. 2011. "New Directions in Refugee Youth Mental Health Services: Overcoming Barriers to Engagement". *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 4, 69-85.
- Ensor, M. O. 2013. "Youth Culture, Refugee (Re)integration, and Diasporic Identities in South Sudan." *Postcolonial Text* 8(3 & 4), 1-19.
- Evans, K. 2016. "A/R/T(HERAPIST)-OGRAPHY, Examining the Weave." In Galvin & Prendergast (Eds.), *Poetic Inquiry II – Seeing, Caring, Understanding*. Sense Publishers, Rotterdam.
- Foster, J. D., G. P. Kuperminc, and A. W. Price. 2004. "Gender differences in posttraumatic stress and related symptoms among inner-city minority youth exposed to community violence." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 33(1), 59-69.
- Fox, M. 2015. "Embodied Methodologies, Participation, and the Art of Research." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 321-332.

- Fox, M. and Fine, M. 2012. "Circulating Critical Research: Reflections on Performance and Moving Inquiry into Action." In Steinberg, S & Cannella, G. (Eds.), *Critical Qualitative Research Reader*. Peter Lang Publishing, New York.
- Frank, A. W. 2010. *Letting stories breathe: A Social-Narratology*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gallardo, H. L., R. Furman and S. Kulkarni. 2009. "Explorations of Depression: Poetry and Narrative in Autoethnographic Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Social Work* 8(3), 287-304.
- Gilbert, A and Y. Sliiep. 2009. "Reflexivity in the practice of social action: from self-to inter-relational reflexivity." *South African Journal of Psychology* 39(4), 468-479.
- Greene, S and M. Hill. 2005. "Researching Children's Experiences: Methods and Methodological Issues." In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds.), *Researching children's experience: Approaches and Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Guruge, S., M. Hynie., Y. Shakya, A. Akbari, S. Htoo. and S. Abiyo. 2015. "Refugee Youth and Migration: Using Arts-Informed Research to Understand Changes in Their Roles and Responsibilities." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 16(3), Art. 15.
- Hill, M. 2005. "Ethical Considerations in Researching Children's Experiences." In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds.), *Researching children's experience: Approaches and Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kabeer, N. 1999. "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." *Development and Change* 30(3), 435-464.
- Magalhaes, L., and S. M. Galheigo. 2014. "Aspects of the resilience and settlement of refugee youth: a narrative study using body maps." *Cad. Ter: Ocup. UFSCar*, Sao Carlos, v. 22.n. 2. 231 - 241. ISSN 0104-4931. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4322/cto.2014.045>.

- Morrice, L. 2013. "Refugees in higher education: boundaries of belonging and recognition, stigma and exclusion," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 32(5), 625-668.
- Mosselson, A. 2010. "‘There is no difference between citizens and non-citizens anymore’: Violent Xenophobia, Citizenship and the Politics of Belonging in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36(3), 641-655. DOI: 10.1080/03057070.2010.507570. Link <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2010.507570>.
- Norton, L., and Y. Sliiep. 2017. "The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education." Unpublished manuscript (Awaiting publication).
- O'Connor, W. A., and B. Lubin. (Eds.). 1984. *Ecological Approaches to Clinical and Community Psychology*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Oliveira, E., and Vearey, J. 2017. "MoVE (methods: visual: explore): Examining the use of participatory visual and narrative methods to explore the lived experience of migrants in Southern Africa. Working Paper 50. *Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium*. University of Sussex.
- Prendergast, M. 2009. "Introduction: The Phenomena of Poetry in Research: "Poem is What?" Poetic Inquiry in Qualitative Social Science Research." In *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences*. Prendergast, M., Leggo, C. & Sameshima, P. (Eds.), Sense Publishers. Rotterdam.
- Rappaport, J. 1995. "Empowerment meets narrative: Listening to stories and creating settings." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23(5), 795 - 807.
- Ratele, K. 2007. "Poverty." In M. Visser (Ed.), *Contextualising Psychology in South Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Riessman, C. K. 2008. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, Sage Publications, London. [Kindle version].

- Richardson, L. 1993. "Poetics, dramatics, and transgressive validity: The case of the skipped line." *The Sociological Quarterly* 34(4), 695-710.
- Rugunanan, P., and R. Smit. 2011. "Seeking refuge in South Africa: Challenges facing a group of Congolese and Burundian refugees." *Development Southern Africa* 28(5), 705-718.
- Sammon, E., and M. E. Santos. 2009. "Agency and Empowerment: A Review of Concepts, Indicators and Empirical Evidence." *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative*. Oxford.
- Seedat, M., A. Van Niekerk, R. Jewkes, S. Suffla, and K. Ratele. 2009. "Violence and injuries in South Africa: prioritising an agenda for prevention." *The Lancet* 374(9694), 1001-1022.
- Shields, N., K. Nadasen, and L. Pierce. 2008. "The effects of community violence on children in Cape Town, South Africa." *Child abuse & neglect* 32(5), 589-601.
- Sliep, Y. 2010. "Teaching for transformation: the use of narrative metaphor to develop reflexive professionals." *Acta Academica: Teaching of psychology in South Africa: Supplementum 2*, 109-132.
- Sliep, Y., and L. Norton. 2016. "Trees, poems and drama to create reflexive spaces for peace building in schools." In Sylvester Mphahosa & Alphonse Kearsley (Eds.), *Peace education for violence prevention in fragile African societies: What's going to make a difference?*, 243 – 274, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa.
- Solomon, H. and H. Kosaka. 2014. "Xenophobia in South Africa: Reflections, Narratives and Recommendations," *Southern African Peace and Security Studies* 2(2), 5–29.
- Squire, C. 2013. "From experience-centred to socioculturally-oriented approaches to Narrative." In Andrews, M., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (Eds.), *Doing Narrative Research*. London: Sage Publications. [Kindle version].

- Suarez-Ortega, M. 2013. "Performance, Reflexivity, and Learning Through Biographical-Narrative Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 19(3), 189 - 200.
- Ward, C. L. 2007. "Young people's violent behaviour: Social learning in context." In P. Burton (Ed.), *Someone Stole My Smile: An Exploration into the Causes of Youth Violence in South Africa* (9). Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention.
- Ward, C. L., A. Dawes, and R. Matzopoulos. 2012. "Youth Violence in South Africa: Setting the Scene." In Ward, C. L., van der Merwe, A., & Dawes, A. (Eds.), *Youth Violence: Sources and Solutions in South Africa.*, Claremont, South Africa: UCT Press.
- Weingarden, K. 2010. "Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Supports." *Family Process* 49(1), 6 – 25.
- World Bank Report. 2014. "Voice and Agency: Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity." World Bank Group.

**Funding:** This work was supported by funding from the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS).

### **5.3 Dissemination of results: Keeping the conversation open**

As part of the ethical process of research it is important to disseminate the results of your research. Russell and Kelly (2002) note that this often starts and ends with publications and presentation in the professional sphere, but that “powerful things sometimes occur when researchers step outside the usual venues for dissemination” (para. 40). In the education phase of the research, we were involved in continual feedback loops and conversation with the participants. As part of a feedback process and continued dialogue with the DRC youth we arranged for a group to represent themselves as the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Community Psychology (Durban, SA, May 2016). The group performed a drama during the presentation and took part in a circular (‘fish bowl’) question and answer session with the audience. They were also included in a New York conference (Performing the World, September, 2016) through a video presentation which included a film made during the research and interviews in which participants were asked to send a message to the audience at the presentation. Having the voices in the room in this way resulted in a moving presentation and personal notes were written to take back to the group. Further, I arranged a “feedback event” in August 2017 with the youth, their guardians, and interested adults from the DRC community. The youth were a central part of this process, which involved them showcasing their talents and telling their stories through drama and poetry. Adults were drawn into the process through narrative theatre to facilitate dialogue across the generations. Although this does not form part of this thesis as the results have not yet been analysed, the event added depth and an additional layer of understanding to the experience, opening the dialogical space more widely to include adults from the DRC community. The youth were vocal and creative and this enabled conversations that they were wanting to have with their guardians and parents centred around expectations they have of their children based on values from their home countries, while youth are growing up in a very different and challenging environment. We are planning to take this conversation further through a brochure or book developed with the youth and the project gatekeeper in an accessible and open format. I also used cellphone photography and video to make a short film of the research which can be seen at [www.tumainiprojects.co.za](http://www.tumainiprojects.co.za) (the community project website) together with photographs and poetry from the workshops and the feedback event. I add these details here not as a formal part of the research, but because I believe the way forward after conducting research especially in a community context is not to ‘just leave’ but to find ways to further facilitate voice, visibility, and connection as a way to keep the conversation open.

## **CHAPTER 6: SYNTHESIS**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction: Inter-Connecting Insights**

The aim of this research was to explore and better understand how life story work develops critical reflexivity and to find out what transformative benefits arise from this. This involved an exploration of the experience of critical reflexivity as developed through life story work in terms of self-development, in education, and in a practice (community) context. I began this journey with an appraisal of my experience of life story work and reflexivity that made me more aware of the complexity and difficulty involved in being reflexive and the need to look deeply into my past to better understand my present. The importance of genuinely challenging my beliefs and assumptions became very apparent, as did the need to explore these aspects creatively and through dialogue that enabled me to reach new insights and move forward rather than becoming stuck in my blind spots. Applying what I had learnt in an educational context and in community practice allowed me the opportunity to see how one's intentions are challenged in reality, how it is sometimes difficult to translate one's values into practice and the importance of continually asking critical questions in relation to each of the loops of the CR Model in each context. Practicing reflexivity throughout the research process meant questioning myself, and understanding that I cannot assume to know things in advance and be the expert, and that it was important to integrate an awareness and sense of accountability into all that I was doing.

Through reflexive questioning, I became open to shifting my position. In a similar way, throughout the research, through facilitating dialogical spaces and critical reflexivity, I have been tracking whether there were opportunities for others to shift in position in relation to their own development, their relationships with others, and in their professional practice. This is an iterative process but I attempted to answer the following questions in light of my current understandings: Were these shifts negative or positive, and can they be referred to as transformative? What important constructs have emerged, and how are these tied to transformation? In terms of my theoretical positioning, I highlighted the importance of a transformative agenda, especially in a SA context. This is closely tied to a narrative and dialogical perspective that seeks to facilitate participants in using their own strengths to find local solutions. Did this happen, how and why? Transformation has been defined as: “a marked change in form, nature, or appearance” (Oxford Dictionary). As such it has been considered a vague, open-ended and complex term. Du Preez et al. (2016) argue, that in higher education, this vagueness should not be considered a problem but rather as an opportunity to ‘rethink’ and research the ideas around transformation and embrace its fluidity. This is important in this research as ‘transformation’ can also mean different things in different contexts and for different



reasons – for example, personal transformation (from self to relational awareness),; transformation in education (structural and ideological) or transformational learning (process and knowledge), or transformation in community (from personal to structural and developmental changes).

Throughout the chapters and articles, I have used a number of terms that may be indicative of transformation, for example ‘shift’ in position or perspective, ‘change’, ‘movement,’ and even seeing and doing things ‘differently’. In relation to education I favoured the view adopted by Merriam and Clark (1991) of looking at the impact of learning experiences on a continuum starting with an expansion of the self and building up to transformation, with the authors emphasising that no matter where on the continuum the change occurred, it still improved learners’ capacity to deal with their life experiences. This is useful as the research has indicated that change or transformation occurs differently for different people within groups (students and teen participants) depending on their own unique needs and where they are in their stories. Some are still grappling with their own shyness and confidence which develops over the module or intervention; others are caught in a difficult relationship which when viewed differently may bring new understandings; and yet others are grappling with structural hardships and despair in an uncertain future that is difficult to change but the struggle may be diminished through hope, agency, or social support.

In view of this research and for the purpose of discussing its outcomes, I describe (not define) transformation as a ‘change in position’ or seeing and positioning oneself differently in relation to the self (identity), others (relationship), the community (contextual), and/or society (ideological). Where ‘identity’ is viewed as “embedded in social relations and as dynamic, contextual and relational” (Andreouli, 2010, p. 14.1), it is viewed in this description as a connecting thread that develops across all levels of transformation. This fits well when envisaged in terms of Positioning Theory which has been defined by Harre & Fathali (2011) as “the study of the nature, formation, influence and ways of change of local systems of rights and duties as shared assumptions about them influence social interactions” (p.133). In these terms a person’s positioning is produced within societal discourses during the course of communication – we locate ourselves within “discursive storylines” as a way of making sense of our position which is both relational (produced with others) and moral (limited by power – moral rights and duties) (Andreouli, 2010, p. 14.4).

When transformation is viewed in light of the above description, the CR Model provides a useful framework with which to track outcomes using life story work: consideration of change in power dynamics (interruption of dominant discourses, shifts in identity development, impact of values and moral responsibility, development of agency (how is the person talking about themselves now?), and performance (has change translated into action? Is it accountable action?). Overall, we look at

whether the story people now tell about themselves has changed, and in what ways? Has the possibility opened for people to have a different conversation?

Through my own reflexive experiences focusing on the self and self-as-researcher in phase one of the research, I found strongly that having an embodied experience of reflexivity helped me move from a more theoretical understanding of social constructionism and reflexivity to one that enabled me to become more honest about my biases, more authentic about my subjectivity, and respecting more the need to enter research as a non-expert. I also moved from a position of uncertainty about how to move forward in my research within a SA context and to take responsibility for my position, especially in terms of privilege. This requires ongoing reflection and is important for making space to move forward as a reflexive researcher. As Boler (2012) states:

This aspect of taking responsibility for how we see and for our positions on the continuum of privilege has to be achieved not through intellectualising or distancing ourselves from what we feel, but, rather, through learning to develop a willingness to inhabit ambiguities within ourselves and between people (p. 169)

It was only through experiencing, deconstructing, dialoguing and diving in and out of my life story that I began to understand the importance of following a similar approach in my research, a way to accommodate all voices in a ‘real’ way. The poetic dialogue I had with my academic supervisor and the heuristic journey through the methodology developed by Clark Moustakas helped me understand myself at a deeper level. This paved the way for a more holistic approach that acknowledges the importance of context in our stories (my own, and others) that I would take with me through the rest of the research.

In phase two of the research, exploring critical reflexivity with students in tertiary education, the shared journeys we took with students, especially with the student from Eritrea, strongly reflected the need for a dialogical and participatory approach. I found through all these papers that adopting a clear conceptual framework facilitated the process of building a map to deconstruct our stories and to develop critical reflexivity. Exploring ‘lived experience’ in this way means that we begin to better understand ourselves and each other through our stories, to *see* things contextually. For the students, this involved different ‘shifts’ for different individuals – from self-awareness, to relational-awareness, to contextual-awareness, and in some cases to a more socially accountable positioning in community.

Using the CR model to analyse and evaluate the community project with refugee youth also proved useful in tracking changes that took place over the workshops with the participants. The teens as a group moved from a position of complete hopelessness and despair (powerlessness), lacking in identity (perceived as foreign), and with no real sense of agency (unable to do anything about their

situation), which lead to inaction and helplessness; to one that included a better sense of worth (strengthened self and group identity). Although, again this varied from person to person, there was a visible sense of increased agency and voice overall, an increased personal confidence, and confidence in the group offering collective social support. As researcher and practitioner during this phase I experienced a further shift in my reflexive development as I applied what I had learnt in practice. It was an iterative process of focusing on my own need to be critically reflexive while at the same time stimulating the participants to develop their own reflexive skills. I continually needed to be aware of and deconstruct the power dynamics in the room, to free up space for the participants voices rather than my own, and to practice the values of equality and transformation. In terms of my own performativity it was important to ensure this happened in reality and was not just lip service. This happened, for example as highlighted above in 5.3, not just by encouraging participants to speak for themselves throughout the intervention but also to attend and perform as part of the research presentation at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Community Psychology (Durban, SA, May 2016).

The dominant shifts in position and emerging constructs in each of the phases are outlined in Table 6 below, and show clear overlaps in each phase and in line with the theoretical constructs developed in terms of the CR model.

**Table 6: Overview of shifting positions and emerging constructs in 3 phases of research**

<b>PHASE OF RESEARCH</b>	<b>SHIFTS IN POSITION</b>	<b>EMERGING CONSTRUCTS</b>
<b>[1] SELF RESEARCHER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiential understanding of theory</li> <li>• Increased self-awareness</li> <li>• Increased agency / voice</li> <li>• Deeper understanding of research – more authentic and ethical approach (non-expert, participatory and dialogical)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of embodied experience</li> <li>• Experiential vs theoretical understandings</li> <li>• Embrace subjectivity</li> <li>• Value of dialogue</li> <li>• Emergence of agency / voice</li> <li>• Enabling possibility of performance</li> </ul>
<b>[2] EDUCATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better understanding of self, others, context, complexities of society</li> <li>• Clearer understanding of how the personal intersects with the professional</li> <li>• Development of ethical positioning in practice</li> <li>• New stories emerging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases sense of identity</li> <li>• Breaking down boundaries for belonging</li> <li>• Agency</li> <li>• Improves relationships</li> <li>• Interlinking of personal - relational - contextual awareness</li> </ul>
<b>[3] COMMUNITY PRACTICE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased sense of social support</li> <li>• Increased power in terms of the group creating new possibilities together</li> <li>• Strengthened personal values leading to self-confidence, self-belief and efficacy</li> <li>• Strengthened group identity</li> <li>• Increased sense of social accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interlinking of self and group identity</li> <li>• Connection between values and personal strengths to boost self-confidence</li> <li>• Voice and performance as agency</li> <li>• Strong social support</li> <li>• Social accountability through sharing stories and forming of social bonds</li> <li>• Practitioner accountability</li> </ul>

In the terms set out above and the description I have used for ‘transformation’ I think it becomes clear that there have been shifts in our (myself and participants) positioning, we see things differently and we are able to have more open and different conversations. I quoted Gergen (2008) earlier in this research when he said: “the moment we begin to speak together, we have the potential to create new ways of being” (p. 29). I feel it is important to repeat this now, as creating such a potential through facilitating a dialogical space where people can share their stories emerges as a very important process. The results may differ in different spaces, and how far we take it may depend on many things; but it opens possibilities for transformation that need to be embraced. In terms of research and higher education it is now widely recognised that we need to go beyond subject content and technical learning and that “it is part of the role of the university to prepare graduates to play a role in a rapidly

changing and globalising world...thus our will to learn and think critically – how we behave, feel and think – is more important in this age than simply what we know, not that the latter is not significant” (Leibowitz et al., 2012, p. xi). In community work too, reflexivity is considered important for psychosocial support, transformation and healing especially in situations of past violence and distrust. By creating spaces for inter-relational reflexivity opportunities arise for creating “the possibility of interacting differently with others in everyday life” and open “new potential for collective moral agency” (Sliep & Gilbert, 2007, p. 301).

Creating ‘possibility’ (“*yellow rain*”) through facilitated dialogical spaces appears repeatedly as a key concept and process (Paper 1: Reflexive Poem ‘Yellow Rain’). But how exactly were these spaces created and what made them ‘work’? I return here to my own story to highlight the potentials I discovered and the shifts that I made through the creative process and dialogue that I followed with my academic supervisor. I tracked my agency along what I called a bumpy, long and slow road. I was often ‘stuck’ along the way and found that it was when I explored my internal creativity that I was able to find deeper meaning and the possibilities for taking another step opened up again (Djuraskovic & Arther, 2011). Reflecting in nature, poetic dialogue and the discovery of ‘yellow rain’ enabled me to see things differently, to change my understanding. As stated in the methodology section, using expressive arts is a way to tap into our intuition and emotions to discover ourselves and to reach deeper insights, and this was revealed very clearly to me throughout the research process (Rogers, 1993). McNiff (2011), in considering how expressive arts therapy can further social change, rightly concludes: “My experience suggests that the deep, complex, and most intractable problems of life cannot be solved or fixed through logical and linear thinking issuing from a particular point of view” (p. 83). This was evident in all phases, if we want to move from a fixed standpoint or position this calls for a creative space where there is an openness to different viewpoints - a ‘reflexive space’ not just a ‘safe space’; a space in which participants can be free to use all their senses and imagination and to express themselves. Having *experienced* this myself during my journey and having witnessed the facilitation of this during the PP module, I saw the value of carefully facilitating such spaces in practice with the refugee youth.

These ‘spaces’ and transformative ‘shifts’ do not come about automatically and require planning and mindful facilitation, which is aided when developed in conjunction with sound theoretical knowledge. Having already highlighted the complex nature of reflexivity and its many definitions and possible processes, Sliep & Gilbert (2007), importantly raise a valid concern in stating that although participants they worked with in Burundi and DRC clearly had shifts in their thinking and behaviour, it was not clear that they understood how these shifts had come about. The implication of this is that participants may not be empowered to transfer any learning or skills to others. The authors suggest thinking around “inter-relational reflective literacy” (p. 301) which is an important consideration. In

this research, we worked differently around the concept of ‘reflexivity’ with the students (tertiary level) and with the teenagers (high school level) and this is definitely required, to stay close to the stories of participants and their needs. With the students, the PP module follows a more academic route and students are exposed to ‘reflexive’ terminology and processes – what are we doing and why – at a much higher level. In working with the youth during the participatory action intervention, we did not use academic ‘reflexive’ terminology, but followed a process that was strongly supported by the CR model so that processes emerged through experiential and creative methods, for example, games about power, life experiences shared through body mapping, and stories of strength to boost identity. However, accessibility and transferability of knowledge and skills are important, as is being able to follow a transparent process that can be evaluated for its efficacy and impact. This is especially difficult, once again because of the complex nature of reflexivity, its many definitions and different ways that can be used to develop it, not just for participants and students, but also for facilitators, educators and practitioners. Increasingly what emerged through the research was the usefulness of a firm theoretical foundation for both developing appropriate methodology and for evaluating (and making visible) what was happening. In Chapter 2, I referred to the CR model as ‘acting’ in a number of ways to support this investigation as a guide for: methodology; facilitation; and analysis. I now, having experienced the CR model in action, take this a step further and explore the CR model as a theory of and for change that can usefully be applied as a basis for developing critical reflexivity across a number of contexts.

## **6.2 A theory of and for change**

As a result of the findings in this study, I view the CR model, as applied as a framework for the narrative methodology offered in the PP module and participatory intervention, as an important tool for aiding in the development of and evaluating critical reflexivity in education and in a community context. For this reason, I examine it here as a theory of change (ToC) for developing critical reflexivity with participants, to test whether my assumptions are correct. Before describing how I view a ToC for these purposes, I refer back to the definitions of reflexivity and critical reflexivity I discussed in Chapter 1 and stay with a broad understanding of reflexivity as giving us a better understanding of how we position ourselves and how our actions are formed by our context and our relationships (Gilbert & Slipe, 2009). It is then through critical reflection about our beliefs and assumptions about the world and our connection to it, that we “become more empowered in acting” within and on our social world (Fook & Askeland, 2007, p.3). In this sense, a critical reflexive process built through a narrative approach is empowering and transformative on a number of different levels (as described above in 6.1). The CR model has been described in detail throughout the research and I will not repeat these details save to highlight that the aim of the model is to bring together

principles from a number of well recognised and valuable theories (*see* Chapter 2) in such a way that enables them to act together as a tool or instrument for developing critical reflexive skills. These skills in turn facilitate individuals (and/or groups) to better negotiate complex social problems and facilitate an agentic approach towards solving them. Specifically in an educational context, the aim is also to develop socially accountable professionals. Understanding this in terms of a social constructionist paradigm means that, since our perceptions of reality are constructed, they are open to change and re-construction – we can play a role in shaping our futures and that of our society.

Although there appears little agreement in the literature on how to define a ToC and these are generally considered in terms of evaluation of interventions in community practice and development, their value for this purpose lies in assisting us to interrogate the CR model as a tool to guide educational or community practice for developing critically reflexive skills. In doing this, we are able to highlight the value of the process and to ensure its visibility and utility. Weiss (1995) describes a ToC as “a theory of how and why an initiative works” (cited in Connell & Kubisch, 1998, p. 2); and Stein & Valters (2012) expand on this by explaining a ToC as “a way to describe the set of assumptions that explain both the mini-steps that lead to a long term goal and the connections between these activities and the outcomes of an intervention or programme” (p. 3). The purpose of having a ToC is to aid organisations (or in this case educators or community training facilitators) with strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, describing the change process, and to clarify the theory behind the programme (Stein & Valters, 2012). When this is done, we are better able to see the connections between the activities and the outcomes, to plan, and to evaluate whether the shifts in learning that we are aiming for are being achieved. “Exposing” the CR model in this way means that it can be more easily used and critically applied by others who want to promote critical reflexive thinking in their students by developing a module or incorporating it into their teaching; or in community practice interventions with trainers or participants.

The steps involved in creating a ToC, although varied, can be viewed as: identifying a long term goal; conducting “backwards mapping” to identify preconditions necessary to achieve that goal; and identifying interventions (or educational programmes) that will facilitate the creation of these preconditions. Indicators are then also needed to assess the performance of the programme (Anderson, 2005). By following the steps set out in creating a ToC, I provide a basis for the use and the evaluation of the CR model within a narrative and life story approach as a tool/programme/intervention (generally referred to here as a ‘programme’ for efficiency). This exercise is principally informed by the data gathered in Chapter 3 (Education) and more specifically in terms of Paper 5 (Norton & Sliep, Hindsight and Foresight for better Insight, *see* ‘Table 3: Patterns, themes and sub-themes identified in the data’ which sets out findings in relation to ‘process,’ ‘outcomes,’ and ‘pre-conditions’). However, it is informed generally from findings in all three phases

and, I believe, would be applicable for programmes particularly in an educational context (developing critical reflexivity in researchers and students); but also, if adapted to suit the particular participants involved, to a community context (strength-based narrative interventions). I speak to this in general terms below:

**[i] Long-term goals are identified:** The aim of the programme is to develop critical reflexivity so that participants are better able to understand and negotiate power dynamics within their context; and to tap into existing capacities (values, identity) to bring positive social change (agency leading to accountable performance). In this study, expected outcomes would depend on the individual participants but would involve a shift in one or more of the following: self-awareness (stronger identity based on values leading to increased agency); relational-awareness (improved relationships, favouring a collaborative approach, embracing diversity); and/or contextual-awareness (seeing the bigger picture, moving towards socially accountable performance). The latter could focus on personal and/or professional performance. Where the programme is geared towards developing critical reflexivity for a particular purpose, for example, as an aid to researchers; or students or professionals in a particular discipline such as health promotion, specific reference needs to be made to this focus.

**[ii] Preconditions necessary for change/performance have been identified:** In terms of the CR model and verified in the data (*see* column 3 of Table 3, 'Pre-conditions,' referred to above) these include: having a safe space for reflection (a precondition for self-awareness and critical consciousness); facilitating storytelling and dialogue within a group (a precondition for relational understandings and social cohesion); understanding power in context; having a positive self- or collective- identity based on core values; having agency (personal, proxy or collective); and building efficacy to perform the socially desirable change or to live the preferred story. These conditions need to be carefully facilitated and do not happen automatically. The participants in an educational context stressed the importance of the facilitator as a "nurturing" guide rather than a lecturer and the importance of taking a "non-expert" stance. This stance was carried through in the community project and was the basis of choosing a participatory action approach. Factors that were considered important in facilitating connectivity (tolerance and acceptance of others) among students, included the importance of being in a group so that the journey is shared, making it possible to find commonalities in overcoming obstacles. Being part of a diverse group offered opportunities to have open discussions and challenge stereotypes. Youth in the refugee project also found that they bonded with each other over shared commonalities and ensuring that the space was safe and non-judgemental. Building trust was key to enabling the possibility of sharing stories authentically.

**[iii] Relevant methodologies and educational strategies are identified:** Narrative, reflexive methodologies are identified for each aspect of the model to develop and to bring about the necessary



preconditions. This is done by facilitating the process of sharing and deconstructing life stories within a dialogical space in such a way as to expose power dynamics; tap into values and strengths to develop identity; and provides the building blocks for developing agency, efficacy, and performance. Participants in education highlighted the need to develop the following skills as laying a foundation for change: critical and reflective thinking, an ability to challenge assumptions, increased ability to see things from different perspectives, better communication skills, increased creativity, and empowerment (of the self and towards others) (*see* column 3 of Table 3).

Transformation was supported by building trust in a supportive, safe space and sharing personal stories through a guided process. The use of expressive arts and creative exercises were also viewed as important by participants as this helped them express themselves more deeply. These methods were widely applied with the youth in the community context and enabled them to share their experiences in non-threatening ways, for example, through body mapping and dramas. Evoking emotions was also considered an important element that enabled participants to reflect more deeply, to express themselves, and to ‘feel’ the process rather than it being solely a cognitive exercise. As stated earlier, it was the creative and poetic dialogue that pushed me further during my own reflexive experience. It moved me beyond my ‘rational’ blind spots, allowing me to dig deeper than I thought possible.

There is no space here for detailing the various exercises that were done with students throughout the years in the PP module or with youth participants throughout the five workshops, as it is beyond the scope of this research. However, using the CR model as a basis has laid the foundation for developing an educational training manual (‘Developing Critical Reflexivity in Education’) and a community practice workbook (‘Teen Friendly Spaces’) which are still in draft form but will be completed in the near future as a practice outcome of this research. The aim of the training manuals is to provide a clear evaluative framework for developing critical reflexivity and will include practical exercises as an aid to facilitate a dialogical space and to navigate participants through the ‘loops’ of the CR model. This exercise has been made possible through the research and the close tracking of preconditions and outcomes of applying reflexivity with myself as researcher, in education, and in practice.

**[iv] A platform to track and evaluate the process and its outcomes is framed:** The CR model provides a basis for developing indicators for change in the form of critical questions to check for shifts in understandings around power, values and identity, and whether agency or performance has taken place. Despite this, it is not an easy task to evaluate reflexivity and there are also ethical questions around this. The process of evaluation is also different if we are looking at evaluating the impact of an intervention or an educational programme, and the latter also depends on whether

individual student marks are required. For evaluating programmes, the suggestion is that facilitators develop questions in terms of the model to assess the process – for example: Was a safe space facilitated? Were participants supported and engaged in the process? Were considerations of power taken into account in the facilitation relationship? Facilitators can develop process evaluation questionnaires for participants and reflexively consider these questions. I develop this further below.

In relation to impact and outcomes for individual participants or students the process is more complex and clearly subjective. Critical questions raised in examining each loop can also be considered: have there been shifts in power, identity, agency, and performance? These questions can only be answered authentically by employing a participatory evaluation where participants are asked to reflect on any changes or insights they think have taken place. As individuals begin the process in different places with different stories, they cannot be judged against each other or by using specific predetermined factors, but rather in terms of their own perceptions of progress and change. This brings us back to the idea of looking at students evaluating their own “expansion” of the self, their perspectives, and relationships along a continuum (Merriam & Clark, 1991). Such an evaluation could act as a final reflexive exercise for students and inform facilitators of the value of the programme. Should the educational programme or reflexive writing assignments require academic marks, Cunliffe (2004) suggests outlining relevant grading criteria beforehand, but still treating the exercise as an opportunity for students to reflect further through comments and questions to challenge further thought. Sinacore et al. (1999) further suggest a “cooperative evaluation process” that includes students in designing evaluation criteria with the educator, and students are then asked to assess their work based on these jointly established criteria (p. 267). Grading reflexive work is controversial and I will not explore the details here regarding the pros, cons or ‘correctness’ of doing so, however, as Hinett (2002) points out, many students are educated within a ‘grade culture’ and therefore often pay more attention when reflective activities are assessed. This can give positive signals about the value and status of the reflective activity, and highlights the “need to give reflection some status in line with other academic work” (p. 39). Further, through doing the above exercise and as a result of this research, it has become apparent that despite the complexity (and possible controversy) of developing an evaluation tool or guide, it is useful to do so. Providing critical questions for considering both process and impact using the CR model means that it acts as a guide to evaluation and assessment (if required) and that it may be applied differently depending on the purpose, particular requirements, and level of the programme.

Using the CR Model as a basis and the critical questions that can be framed in terms of the dialogical space and each ‘loop,’ has enabled me to construct a comprehensive guide which I offer below for its utility in aiding the evaluation process both for the overall efficacy of a program, which is relevant for considering the CR Model in terms of a ToC, and as a guide for assessing participants (*see* Table 8,

The CR Evaluation Guide). Before going into this detail (*see* 6.3 below) I provide a summary of the overall findings addressed here. It is not an easy task to ‘box’ reflexivity or to categorise the ways in which it is to be developed. Nor, in light of the dynamic and iterative nature of reflexivity is this necessarily recommended and may well be considered contrary to the ‘nature’ of reflexivity itself. However, I have performed this exercise and summarised the findings in terms of this examination of the methodology as a ToC below (*see* Table 7) for the purpose of utility, so that our ideas can be shared and transferred more easily. Evidence from this study has shown that using the CR model has borne transformative results and I stress the efficacy then of exploring the questions and challenges offered by each of the aspects highlighted in the loops as part of developing critical reflexivity within a dialogical space. However, owing to the dynamic nature of the model and the importance of contextual relevance, I do still advocate flexibility in the use of the CR model as a ToC.

**Table 7: Summary of CR Model in terms of Theory of Change Evaluation**

<b>THEORY OF CHANGE EVALUATION: CR MODEL WITHIN NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK</b>					
	<b>Dialogical Space</b>	<b>Power</b>	<b>Values &amp; Identity</b>	<b>Agency &amp; Responsibility</b>	<b>Accountable Performance</b>
<b>Long term goals</b>	Develop critical reflexivity	Better understanding of power in context	Building identity based on core values	Develop sense of agency and efficacy	Bring positive social change
<b>Preconditions for change</b>	Safe, creative space Sharing stories Dialogues Group context Participatory facilitation	Deconstructing power in context	Tapping into values Stories of strength Connections to others	Space for all voices to be heard and all stories are valued	Bringing individuals together in group settings (diverse groups offer opportunities to challenge stereotypes)
<b>Methodologies &amp; educational strategies</b>	Narrative, reflexive and creative methods Facilitating dialogue Challenging assumptions Trust building	Challenging impact of dominant discourses – developing critical thinking	Creative methodology to tap into value systems + stories of strength (self + group)	Developing communicative and creative skills for self-expression, confidence and efficacy in terms of values	Facilitating connectivity, building team work for social thinking Empowering individual and group towards action
<b>Critical questions for evaluating outcomes and process</b>	Was a safe space facilitated? Were all voices heard? Was facilitation participatory and inclusive? Did participants feel supported?	Has there been a change in how power is understood in relation to self, others, social (interruption of dominant discourses)?	Have there been any shifts in identity development – self / group? Are these based on core values?	Has there been an increase in agency/ voice? (This may be expressed in a number of forms including: self-confidence, self-belief, efficacy, optimism, hopefulness)	Have there been any changes in perspectives? (self; relational; contextual) Are these socially accountable? Has intention been transferred into action?

## 6.3 The CR Evaluation Guide

### 6.3.1 Introduction to the guide

In terms of evaluation, the CR Model can be used at a number of levels with both facilitators and participants, to include participants in a participatory evaluation process from the outset in a similar way to that suggested by Sincore et al. (1999) above. I now explore this further as the efficacy of providing a more comprehensive guide to evaluation using the CR Model has emerged through the research process due to the complexity and difficulty of evaluation in this field. The CR Evaluation

Guide is not prescriptive, but provides an expedient and versatile framework for assessing the development of critical reflexivity at a number of levels.

### **6.3.2 Purpose and aim of the guide**

In a recent study focused on introducing reflexivity to participatory evaluation practice, van Draanen (2017) highlights both the scarcity of literature on reflexivity to guide evaluation practices; and its importance for advancing ethical evaluation procedures. She concludes that introducing reflexivity to this process has the potential to “cultivate a heightened sensitivity toward the way some evaluations reinforce marginalisation and exclusion and perpetuate societal inequity that stems from inequality of power” (p. 373). The author also offers a practical model that encourages the researcher / evaluator to reflect and think critically throughout the process of the evaluation (in her case a participatory evaluation of a project targeting homelessness and mental health issues) on their social location, the self and values, power dynamics, decision-making, biases (in methodology and institutional processes), and the intended use of the evaluation and the evaluator’s role in perpetuating inequality (*see* Practical Model, p. 363). Activities to put this into place for the researcher include regular journaling with critical questions, discussions with team members, meta-reflecting on the process of reflexivity, and engaging with critical others. The model and activities offer a useful guide to the researcher / evaluator in following their own reflexive evaluation process, especially in highlighting the “political context” in which evaluation takes place and the importance of being aware of power dynamics (van Draanen, 2017. p. 362). A number of these issues (for example, power, identity and values) are also reflected in the CR Model and thus form a part of the CR Evaluation Guide in terms of guiding facilitators, however, the former (van Draanen’s Practical Model) offers an approach for ensuring the evaluators reflexivity throughout the intervention process broadly speaking; while the latter (CR Evaluation Guide) looks more specifically at evaluating a programme that develops critical reflexivity through working with life stories (has this happened?). It also acts as an assessment guide for programmes, for example in education, where participants or students need to be assessed after their participation in the programme. For this reason the CR Evaluation Guide has a more specific aim and is more explicit in its focus. While van Draanen’s model (2017) remains as a valuable check of an evaluator’s overall reflexivity and positionality when assessing a programme, the CR Evaluation Guide has been developed as an aid specifically to:

- i. evaluate the success of programmes that focus on developing critical reflexivity; and/ or
- ii. assess the development of critical reflexivity in individual participants.

The CR Evaluation Guide offers a participatory and interactive process, closely linking the critical questions set for facilitators and for participants, whose insights are all considered integral to the evaluation.

### **6.3.3 Development of the guide**

The CR Evaluation Guide has been developed from the findings of this research which shows that the overriding indicators of success in developing critical reflexivity are whether there has been an advantageous ‘shift’ in position in participants' perceptions of self, others, and their current context. The guide has therefore been divided into a number of levels and offers critical questions at each level to accommodate different forms of evaluation: process (implementation of the programme); and impact (effectiveness of the programme). Impact is also viewed in terms of the impact of the programme on the development of the self, its impact on relationships, and contextual factors. Although these levels are directly based on the findings in this study, they fit well with learning in general, which Hinett (2002) describes as individual (starting from a person’s own position of knowledge and experience); contextual (context affects understanding); relational (feedback and new information is related to existing knowledge and experience); and developmental (integrated understanding leads to informed choices). Such overall learning she concludes is “best achieved through a process of reflection,” engaging in dialogue with peers and tutors, and then relating feedback to current understandings (p. 1). This process is taken deeper in relation to reflexivity that is developed through life story work, but the manner of engaging across all these levels is considered a necessity in both cases.

In a similar fashion, Prpic (2005), in developing a model for holistic reflexive practice for academics, recognises the need for the integration of three view-points: the intra-view (connection to and deeper understanding of self); the inter-view (connection to others through dialogue and questioning); and the trans-view (connection to the collective which contextualises the intra- and inter-views). This is supportive of the findings of this study and the need to recognise various levels of reflexive practice. Prpic (2005) also importantly and rightly emphasises the “dynamic and vibrant relationship” between each of the views, concluding that the “impetus for change only comes from the interaction between all three views, and it is the combination of all three views that constitutes truly reflexive practice” (p. 405). In this research, such a relationship would point to an ideal outcome of instilling critical reflexivity at all levels. However, the findings indicate that this is not an easy task and especially in relation to students or community participants (rather than academics) happens more haphazardly in different ‘amounts’ and at different times within and across the different levels, and evaluation needs to take this reality into account.

The levels referred to above then are provided so that it is possible for the facilitator to assess the programme depending on its objectives, the purpose of the evaluation, and available resources. For example, cost and time may demand a quick assessment of the process followed, rather than a more in-depth analysis of the impact of the programme. In relation to assessing individual participants' progress or reflexive development, the levels also provide flexibility to assess change beginning from where each individual participant is positioned at the beginning of the programme and tracking development over the life span of the programme. This is critical because, as already noted, participants do not begin this process on an even playing field – they generally begin the programme at different places in their stories and usually will have had varied exposure in the past to reflexivity and critical thinking. Assessing the extent to which reflexivity has developed requires a benchmark of the original level of reflexivity, which is difficult to pinpoint but 'shifts' can be viewed in terms of how an individual's story has developed from the first telling to the final reflexive write-up in which participants are invited to reflect on their own development. The research has also revealed that the shifts experienced by participants can take different directions so, for example, one participant may experience personal growth and increased confidence whereas another may move from a position of prizing individuality to one of relational responsibility, or an already self-aware participant may begin to value the importance of following a collaborative and socially responsible approach in their professional practice.

It is these complexities that make evaluating such a process difficult and potentially 'unfair' if the same yardstick is used for all participants. What we are looking to assess then is not in all cases the final level of reflexivity attained (although for some this may be the desirable goal), but rather to track whether beneficial change or growth has taken place through following the programme. Because this is generally highly subjective and would require much reflexivity on the part of the evaluator to ensure that the evaluator's biases do not heavily influence the assessment (in line with van Draanen's approach above); I attempt here to provide a guide that offers a transparent and semi-structured process that can be applied easily and sets up the basis for a participatory process using established criteria. As van Draanen (2017) states: "Reflexivity is not resource-neutral. This presents a true challenge in evaluations that have limited resources, because reflexive practice takes time" (p. 373). The author also cautions against the possibility of a reflexive process that centres on the evaluator to such an extent that they may actually misuse or legitimise their authority. Finding a gauge for moderating the evaluators subjectivity and bias (which in a reflexive approach is well recognised) and to apply criteria consistently is a useful step. The tug in evaluation is to move towards a more objective and impartial approach while remaining well aware of our subjectivities (these and other paradoxes in the application of reflexivity are discussed further in section 6.6).

To scaffold the process of offering an accessible evaluation guide based on the CR Model, critical questions are developed within each level referred to above. These questions are organised in an overlapping hierarchical form using Benjamin S. Blooms Revised Taxonomy (the Revised Taxonomy), taking into account knowledge dimensions (factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive); and more specifically the cognitive process dimensions of remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating (Krathwohl, 2002). The Revised Taxonomy stems from the taxonomy developed by Bloom in 1956 (the Original Taxonomy) to set out a framework of educational objectives as an aid to clarifying teaching goals (Krathwohl, 2002). The Revised Taxonomy has been used here, specifically for furthering and clarifying the educational requirements of programmes developing reflexivity, as a check that participants are moved beyond knowledge and towards what Krathwohl (2002) calls the most important goals of education: from understanding towards synthesis. Critical reflexivity by nature requires moving beyond understanding to applying the process and skills of reflexivity – it involves action. The knowledge dimension on the Revised Taxonomy also offers a fourth new category that was not part of the Original Taxonomy and is important for the purposes of reflexivity – metacognitive knowledge. This category includes strategic knowledge, knowledge of cognition in general, and knowledge and awareness of one’s own cognition (self-knowledge) (Krathwohl, 2002; Pintrich, 2002). Pintrich (2002) highlights the importance of metacognitive knowledge because of its positive link to learning and is of the view that it should be embedded within content-driven lessons and explicitly taught. This is especially important for a programme that aims to develop critical reflexive skills where it is the *skill* itself which is to learnt, transferred, practiced and then, it is hoped, becomes a part of the participants own method of learning and, later, professional practice. Ideally, critical reflexivity becomes an integral part of the way a person acts, learns, researchers, and practices. In working with life stories, these skills are applied and critically analysed in terms of each participant’s own story and context through a deconstruction that involves all levels of knowledge and learning processes.

Chamberlain (2012) uses a *Six As* framework (acknowledgement, analysis, assessment, application, action, articulation) with key questions for clarifying reflexive practice and assessment for a reflective practice journal as part of a social enterprise stream. The author supports such an approach as enabling rigour, training students and opening the reflective process to them, and offering an assessable framework. Chamberlain (2012) highlights one of the most difficult features of assessing reflective practice as: “what precisely do we understand reflection to be?” (p. 29). This is often a clear problem with critical reflexivity as well (as shown earlier in the literature review) and providing additional guidance to facilitators and to participants in the form of critical questions helps underpin what is required from the programme overall. Chamberlain (2012) also likens her framework to the Revised Blooms Taxonomy in recognising the complexity involved in the learning process but differentiates her framework with the elements seen as parallel rather than hierarchical to allow for



individual differences in learning styles and thought processes. This is also important in the current guide so that it can be used at various levels, but instead I consider the usage in this context as an ‘overlapping’ hierarchy that is in keeping with the Revised Taxonomy. The revised version has relaxed the strict hierarchical structure of the original taxonomy, recognising the overlap that occurs between the categories while still being cognisant of the growing complexity of the categories (Krathwohl, 2002). This is in keeping with the idea of critical reflexivity involving the development of thinking skills at higher cognitive levels as it becomes more advanced; and Blooms taxonomy as a “measurement tool for thinking” (Forehand, 2005, p. 4).

Vos and Cowan (2009) have used the original Bloom’s taxonomy as a basis for developing a taxonomy of reflection. ‘Reflection’ in terms of their research is considered as “the thinking process that takes place in answering reflective questions,” (p. 3). The authors identify six levels of reflection corresponding to Bloom’s taxonomy: recognising reflection and remembering what reflection is; comprehension of reflection; critical incident analysis; process analysis; open reflection; and self-evaluation of reflection (pp. 4 – 8). Although, as stated by the authors, the taxonomy still requires empirical validation and they suggest further research, they are of the view that it can be used together with reflective questions to focus teachers and students alike on reflective thinking and thereby improve practice. They conclude that it is “highly urgent to develop simpler tools to let people know and understand reflection as a first step to applying reflection” (p. 10). This is also the case with reflexivity which, despite its recognised value, is generally considered a more complex concept to grasp than reflection. As ‘action’ is a key component of reflexivity, more than self-appraisal is required, but what does this involve? Therefore, in terms of education especially, it is important to provide clarity on objectives and assessment – what exactly are participants expected to achieve? Using Blooms Original or Revised Taxonomy appears a useful way to move towards this, and although requiring further research in relation to both reflection and reflexivity, provides a solid foundation for building an evaluation guide that is based on well-recognised and clear educational principles. Hinett (2002) in regard to developing reflection in law, however, is of the view that the cognitive domain of Bloom’s taxonomy is limited for assessing reflection and that one should more closely consider the affective domain. This is a valid assertion as affective learning concerns attitudes, beliefs and values about knowledge and information (Pierre & Oughton, 2007), which fit well with reflection and reflexivity. In a study examining student journals Bolin, Khramtsova and Saarnio (2005) argue for a balance between the cognitive and affective domains by using ‘authentic assignments’ which “provide personal context and infuse value” (p. 158). Using life stories is also a way to do this, and deeper consideration of the impact of this on affective learning would be valuable especially in relation to better understanding how and why learning takes place. It is, however, beyond the scope of this research but is recommended as an important area for further investigation.

For the present purposes the value of using the cognitive domain of the Revised Taxonomy as an aid to evaluation lies in establishing a basis for checking the levels of knowledge that participants acquire as they progress through the reflexive process. The benefit of this is well put by Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2012) in stating, in relation to reflexivity and creative processes in qualitative research projects: “Bloom’s taxonomies not only serve as markers or as maps of where one is headed but also as developmental signposts in order to increasingly complicate our thinking” (p.4). This scaffolding is important in the present case because of the subjective and complex nature of reflexivity so that its educational worth can be evaluated in terms of the critical questions that arise using the CR Model. The Revised Taxonomy table provides for the representation of teaching and learning objectives on two dimensions – knowledge and cognitive processes (Krathwohl, 2002). Evaluating a reflexivity programme, especially in an educational context, becomes more accessible and user-friendly when these processes are clarified so that there is a check in place to ensure that learning has taken place, what kind of learning, and at what level.

Although the CR Model proposes an iterative process and developing critical reflexivity requires a moving back and forth through the loops, each loop can also be viewed as a building block or taking a step towards greater insight and reflexivity. In this sense it represents a process whereby reflexive skills and critical thinking increase as this movement happens. This fits well when considering these critical skills developing in terms of the cognitive processes of the Revised Taxonomy where participants in a programme are moved from remembering and understanding reflexive terminology and concepts, towards applying these in their own lives through a deconstruction of their life stories. Developing critical and reflexive thinking involves taking this application further and analysing the impact of these intentions and actions; evaluating performance and then using these learnings to create new and preferred stories. As an integral part of the process, exercises are introduced to participants in the dialogical space to move participants through each of the loops from factual to conceptual, procedural, and ultimately metacognitive knowledge. This is an important aspect as participants begin to learn about the how and why of the reflexive process and gain an awareness of their own cognition and reflexivity – it opens the possibility of becoming and *being* a reflexive student or practitioner. This is made possible only when we are able to understand the nature and process of knowledge, and how we come to hold the beliefs and assumptions that we do so that we become more open to alternative viewpoints. Door (2014) stresses that reflexivity is not just about an understanding or awareness of how we position ourselves, but goes further to ensure that our actions are in line with our ethical position. What is important here is an integration of all aspects of the CR model for the development of a metacognitive understanding of our positioning in a social context so that we can perform in a socially accountable manner that is in keeping with our espoused values – we can walk the talk. Integrating all aspects in this way means that *being* critically reflexive becomes

internalised, a new way of thinking and of being as the ultimate goal, rather than developing skills that are applied only in certain instances.

#### **6.3.4. The guide in practice**

Based on the above, the CR Evaluation guide has been set out in a table divided into the levels discussed and setting out critical questions for facilitators and participants; suggested assessment activities and instruments; and evaluation indicators demonstrating programme and/or participant success. The table can be accessed in a number of ways, including:

- i. By facilitators to conduct a process evaluation of their programme by following a reflexive questioning guide and inviting feedback from participants (level 1); and/or
- ii. By facilitators to conduct an impact evaluation of their programme by answering critical questions on levels 2 (programme aimed at self-reflexivity), and/or 3 (relational reflexivity), and/or 4 (contextual reflexivity); in conjunction with input from participants in terms of those levels.
- iii. By facilitators to assess individual participants success in a programme, especially in an educational context. This could involve assessment on:
  - Participation, attendance, basic knowledge of reflexivity (level 1); and/ or
  - Shifts in individual development (level 2); and/ or
  - Shifts in relational development (level 3); and/ or
  - Shifts in contextual understandings (level 4).

This assessment can take place:

- Vertically (highest achievement assessment) - to view the overall highest level of critical reflexivity achieved across all levels, for example, how far has a participant proceeded from acquiring basic knowledge of reflexivity and demonstrating critical reflexivity through understanding the self, others, and the contextual influence of their actions; and/ or
- Horizontally (individual achievement assessment) - within a particular 'impact' level assessment can be viewed by considering individual growth during the programme, for example, a participant may not have moved beyond level 2 but has demonstrated the development of critical reflexivity within this level in terms of personal growth.

The CR Evaluation Guide is set out below (*see* Table 8).

**Table 8: CR Evaluation Guide**

<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>Critical Questions for Facilitators</b>	<b>Critical Questions for Participants</b>	<b>Assessment Activity/ Instrument</b>	<b>Programme Evaluation Indicators</b>	<b>Participant Evaluation Indicators</b>
<p><b>Level 1</b></p> <p><b>Process</b></p> <p><b>Dialogical Space</b> [To deepen understanding and create visibility around self &amp; other]</p>	<p>Describe and reflect on: Was a safe space facilitated? Were participants supported throughout the process? Did all participants engage in the process? Were considerations of power taken into account in: facilitation, the group, &amp; in terms of structural power? Was there a focus on values? Were exercises tailored to strengthen (individual/ group) identity? Were all participants given voice? Were relevant terminologies/ characteristics explained &amp; understood?</p>	<p><i>Discuss and explain:</i> <i>Did you feel safe?</i> <i>Was trust facilitated?</i> <i>Did you feel comfortable sharing your stories?</i> <i>Did you feel heard?</i> <i>Did you feel supported?</i> <i>How did you experience the relationship with the facilitator?</i> <i>How was the overall facilitation?</i> <i>What do you understand about the term 'reflexivity'?</i></p>	<p><b>Facilitator:</b> Observation Checklist &amp; reflexive questions</p> <p><b>Participants:</b> Short form evaluation questionnaire (mix of closed and open questions)</p>	<p>Participants felt safe to share stories, were engaged in the process and positive about the facilitation</p>	<p>Participants show:</p> <p>High levels of attendance and participation in individual exercises and group discussions;</p> <p>Knowledge of terminology and basic requirements for and characteristics of reflexivity</p>
<p><b>Level 2</b></p> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <p><b>Self</b> [To explore effect of positioning of perceived self on self &amp; others]</p>	<p>Describe and reflect on: Was there a shift in power dynamics? In what way? Did participants act in terms of their values? Were there any shifts in agency? Did participants follow through with actions?</p>	<p><i>Describe and explain any changes you experienced in relation to your understanding of yourself, others, your context in terms of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>power</i></li> <li>• <i>your values and identity</i></li> <li>• <i>your ability to do things differently (agency)</i></li> <li>• <i>whether you have done anything differently (performance).</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Describe how any of these changes makes you feel and impacts your life.</i></p>	<p><b>Facilitator:</b> Observation notes, reflexive questions and journaling</p> <p><b>Participants:</b> Reflexive essay or open-ended questionnaire / focus group</p>	<p>Overall participants show a shift in self-development in keeping with values, seen in action (e.g. self-awareness, confidence, communication)</p>	<p><b>Vertical:</b> Knowledge and understanding of self-reflexivity</p> <p><b>Horizontal:</b> Developed sense of self-appraisal, understanding and application of power and values in own life story to develop own agency and action</p>

LEVEL	Critical Questions for Facilitators	Critical Questions for Participants	Assessment Activity/ Instrument	Programme Evaluation Indicators	Participant Evaluation Indicators
<b>Level 3</b>  <b>Impact</b>  <b>Relational</b>  <b>[Translation of awareness of above into personal and professional practice]</b>	Describe and reflect on: Were there any changes in the relationships between facilitators and participants? Were there any changes in the relationships between participants? Describe any benefits or disadvantages in regard to these changes?	<i>Discuss and show how any of the changes you experienced have made or can make a difference to your relationships with others, (personally and/or in professional practice) in relation to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>power</i></li> <li>• <i>your values and identity</i></li> <li>• <i>;your ability to do things differently (agency)</i></li> <li>• <i>whether there has been any change in the relationship(s).</i></li> </ul> <i>Describe how any of these changes makes you feel and impacts your life and the lives of others.</i>	<b>Facilitator:</b> Reflexive questions, journaling  <b>Participants:</b> Reflexive essay / focus group / interviews	Overall participants show a shift from individual to relational / collaborative approach (e.g. empathy, team work)	<b>Vertical:</b> Show understanding of relational reflexivity and can apply through an example.  <b>Horizontal:</b> Show developed sense of self-in-action-with others and relational awareness and applies to relationships in terms of own life story
<b>Level 4</b>  <b>Impact</b>  <b>Contextual/ Social</b> <b>[Translation into lifelong learning with integration of personal &amp; professional resulting in socially accountable ethical positioning]</b>	Describe and reflect on: Are the changes that took place socially accountable and in what ways? How do these shifts contribute to a more just society?	<i>Describe and analyse how any of the changes you experienced have made or can make a difference in your community/ social context.</i>  <i>Critically examine the process you have been through and produce a plan for how you can use these skills in a socially accountable way in your future.</i>	<b>Facilitator:</b> Reflexive questions, journaling  <b>Participants:</b> Reflexive essay/ focus group/ interviews	Overall participants show and action an awareness of social responsibility and need for social accountability in personal and/ or professional lives	<b>Vertical:</b> Display critical thinking and produce a creative synthesis of new understandings  <b>Horizontal:</b> Show developed sense of self-in-context and increased awareness of social responsibility, applies to performance in terms of own life story

Although the development of the CR Evaluation Guide applies most directly to the development of critical reflexivity through working with life stories as it stems from the results of this research, I believe that it could also guide evaluation in other programmes that focus on various other methods to develop reflexivity as highlighted in the literature review. For example, the guide could prove useful for the assessment of a reflexive journaling exercise. Further, the evaluation exercises and instruments proposed above are offered as suggestions only and could also be varied. For example, one could include dialogical and creative exercises that focus particularly on participative evaluation, such as the group collage that was done with participants in Paper 4 (Hindsight and Foresight for better Insight). The critical questions can also be given to participants to guide them during their reflexive exercises and as a basis for forming participatory objectives and evaluation criteria at the outset or during the programme.

A potential limitation of application of the CR model and the evaluation guide emerges when we consider more deeply the complexity and range of outcomes possible owing to factors such as individual differences in participants, the composition of groups, type of facilitation, the purpose and content of the particular programme, and any number of other influencing factors. ‘Transformation’ and whether this has taken place to the desired extent is still not readily understood nor easily visible. The CR Evaluation Guide was developed on a number of levels to allow for different outcomes and to accommodate these complexities and differences. This is useful for the reasons explained above and facilitates the possibility of providing an assessment that is non-judgmental of individuals in recognition that developing reflexivity can happen in different ways and involve a variety of important outcomes. Nevertheless, it is also important to recognise and elucidate what the main objectives of developing critical reflexivity are, particularly in regard to students in an educational context. If the overall aim is to open a process that aids transformation or a shift in position at any level of the CR Evaluation Guide (self, relational, or contextual) and to welcome any shift that increases critical and reflexive thinking to consider the programme a success, we need go no further. However, if the overall aim is essentially, as it is for the PP module, to develop critical reflexivity to the extent that these skills can be translated into and applied in professional practice, we need to take this a step further. This means aiming for students to develop more than just self-reflexivity and developing a programme with the objective of facilitating and integrating reflexivity at all levels set out in the CR Evaluation Guide. Students will need to be guided through a process that moves them from level 2 (self) to ensuring that they are able to translate the self-awareness developed at that level into professional practice which will impact their relationships with others in their professional capacity (level 3), and integrating it into their lifelong learning to impact their overall stance as socially accountable members of their community (level 4). This would be in keeping with Prpic’s (2005) view highlighted above in 6.3.3 where she emphasises that it is only in the combination of all

three view-points (intra-view, inter-view, and trans-view) in her terms, and an integration of all levels in terms of the CR Evaluation Guide, that will constitute 'true' reflexive practice.

In terms of the CR model, attaining these higher levels of reflexivity (or an integrated reflexivity) acquaints with accountable performance. In practical terms this means being able to apply and translate one's personal reflexivity into practice. This is the ideal, and would mean investigating outcomes along all levels of the CR Evaluation guide, but whether this is actually achieved in the long term remains in reality difficult to assess. The participants in the current study in both the educational context and the community project all showed different levels of development immediately after the completion of the programme, often depending on their past and current circumstances on starting the programme. In Paper 4, I attempted to investigate the application of reflexivity in practice by focusing on the experience of students who had completed the PP module and most of whom were then in professional practice. I found that there was evidence of a more integrated reflexivity, but in that paper also point out the shortcomings of these findings and the importance of developing this aspect of performativity further. As part of the Health Promotion Masters, the PP module is linked to a community project which takes place after completion of the module and in which students are then required to apply their learnings in practice. As noted in Paper 4, Brown (2004) also advocates for "action based on reflection" (p. 96) and suggests encouraging community-based learning or for students to develop 'activist action plans'. Adding 'action' projects to a reflexive programme opens the possibility for students to apply their learning and for checking or evaluating whether and to what extent students are able to translate their critical reflexive skills into practice. From observations while working with students in the community practice module at UKZN, it is clear that different individuals (and sometimes whole groups in a particular year) apply their skills at different levels. If some or all students in a particular group experience difficulty with translating and applying reflexive skills in practice, this may be considered a shortcoming of the programme.

Further, if the particular reflexive programme does not have this additional practice project or students are not later assessed in their professional practice, this too can be considered a shortcoming in evaluation. There are obvious challenges to taking the process this far, including the need for financial resources and additional time where, in many cases, the time set aside to develop reflexive skills is already very limited. The PP module is a dedicated semester course and there still remain challenges in developing 'integrated' reflexivity among the students. As the research shows, nonetheless there are valuable shifts that take place which can be assessed using the CR Evaluation Guide, which in an important sense can also provide an overall indication of the extent or not of the integration of the levels provided. This should indicate to facilitators where there are gaps in the programme and so aid in the development of a 'better' or more comprehensive programme if resources allow.

In summary, further research on the practical application of this guide is recommended; but is here viewed as a foundation for working with life stories to develop critical reflexivity, especially for an educational programme, as it provides the basis for identifying whether transformative change has taken place or is taking place. It provides a basis for evaluating what is happening with a particular group, placing the educator/ trainer in a better position to plan what is required further in their particular context during and after the programme. As highlighted continually throughout this research, critical reflexivity is complex not only in its conceptualisation but also in application, resulting in almost exclusively a subjective evaluation as to whether it has developed and “worked.” The CR Evaluation Guide provides a reflexivity tool to guide this practice.

#### **6.4 Going forward: Contribution of thesis and recommendations**

This research has documented and tracked the development of critical reflexivity through the use of life stories across contexts: from self as researcher to practitioner, and in an educational and community context. This has been done in a way that can be analysed, evaluated, and therefore becomes possible to replicate. The CR model and life story methodology together offer an original ‘reflexive package’ or guide to people wanting to use critical reflexivity within an educational setting, or as part of community practice. Critical reflexivity as envisaged here brings together the theoretical and the practical. It is revealed as a process that can be developed and used in a number of ways within the CR framework: to guide the development of a training module, to evaluate outcomes, or to open a practice of critically questioning processes, and facilitation and training. As part of my own reflexivity and in keeping with a dialogical approach, I developed a strong belief in the importance of accessibility and utility of information and tools for transformation (challenging the status quo). If we believe, in keeping with the principles of Critical Communicative Methodology (CCM), that all people have the ability to analyse their own reality and contribute to knowledge (see Chapter 2) ways need to be found to make space for this to happen in educational and community contexts. Further, if we are advocating for critical thinking and criticism, especially in education as espoused by Critical Social Theory (CST), we need to find ways for students to practice this. In this sense, important theoretical principles and approaches require action to become a reality and need to be accessible not only to an elite few academics but across the board. I view using the CR model and life story methodology as a way of applying theory in practice that can be made accessible at different levels. It is both complex (built on a strong theoretical basis after years of research); and ‘simple’ and dynamic (we all tell stories about our lives, and the CR model provides a way of challenging the beliefs and assumptions we take for granted by challenging us to ask the right questions).

The research has revealed further that it is necessary to move beyond ‘reflection’ in its static form where the emphasis is placed on the cognitive domain (McArdle & Coutts, 2003). Bleakley (1999)



highlights the dangers of not clarifying what is meant by the term reflection and debating its value in practice, especially in terms of higher education where there is the potential that it becomes used as a tool that reaffirms current beliefs rather than critically analysing them. An important critique in this regard relates to the consideration of ‘autonomy’ as a natural state rather than as a social construction or ‘discursive effect’ (Bleakley, 1999, p. 318). Bleakley (1999) thus calls for a ‘holistic reflexivity’ that is reflection-as-action that includes “the aesthetic and the ethical, as a practice of sensitivity to, and a caring for, the world” (p. 328). This, he says, moves reflectivity from the descriptive to the critical, problematizes action in terms of values, and moves beyond the personal to include others. In sum, he frames holistic reflexivity as a complex synthesis of interdependent components “where practice is conceived as artistry” (p. 329). This research reveals ‘reflexivity’ in similar ways as a multifaceted concept that is not easy to define or to ‘pin down’ as it involves more than a cognitive framing or action. It involves, or is, a way of practicing that is dialogical, relational, embodied and aesthetic. This appears to add to the complexity and broadness of the term, however, the research also provides a way to move towards a ‘holistic’ critical reflexive position that is ethical and accountable when framed in terms of the CR model. It provides a way for researchers, students, or participants to build reflexive ‘skills’ or, better put in terms of a social constructionist perspective, to develop reflexivity as “a discursive and performative practice” (Gemignani, 2017, p. 185). Gemignani (2017) highlights the importance, in qualitative research, of conceptualizing reflexivity as inquiry that involves ‘ongoing questioning’ and is of the view that reflexivity should “not aim at better representing a phenomenon but rather at diffracting its perception against any form of authority” (p. 193). In this sense critical reflexivity, however defined, is required to open the possibility of transforming – becoming able to look at things from multiple perspectives and to take accountable actions in terms of the new understandings one gains relationally in a dialogical space about power, identity and values, moral agency, and social performance. In learning to continually question each of these aspects in a contextually holistic way, we become better at practicing reflexivity.

For further practical effectiveness, and going forward with this research to make it more accessible I am continuing to work with my academic supervisor and a research team to write the training manuals referred to above. We would also like to conduct further workshops and offer training in the methodology in both an educational and community context. An important outcome of this research is that, beyond tracking the outcomes of reflexivity, it provides a solid foundation on which to do this (to ‘act’), and can be viewed as a step towards bringing academic research into practice. Having experienced the value of this methodology myself and ‘seen’ it in action with others, I strongly recommend that it is used more widely and across disciplines, especially in education, as this provides a platform for developing students into critical thinkers in a way that is contextually relevant and opens the possibility for socially accountable performance in practice.

The conversation that has started in this research is in itself an iterative one that can never be drawn to a definitive solution, but, I believe, needs to be taken further. As Gomez et al. (2011) state: “The dialogue between researchers and social actors with a critical communicative orientation always involves a commitment to study (and to name) the solutions to social problems. This may lead to actual social change: The actors can then press policy makers to implement and extend those solutions by developing action plans, policies, and legislations that include them” (p. 242). In regard to education, I believe the next step is to recommend that critical reflexivity should be made an integral part of all student programmes and not just in the health or care professions and that this needs to be considered at an institutional level. As Waghid (2009) states, “the university should indeed perform a public role by creating opportunities for its students and academics to take responsibility for their own ideas, to take intellectual risks, to develop a deep sense of respect for others, and learn how to think and engage critically with others in a democratic society” (p. 72-73). Facilitating spaces for people to share stories creates an opportunity to enhance insight and develop intentions for actions that contribute to a more equal and just society. As highlighted in the literature review, this is particularly necessary in an SA context and across SA educational institutions to redress the inequality of the past and as part of a participative and contextual approach to decolonising education. The methodology detailed in this research offers such an opportunity in a practical and useful way, that can be applied at a number of levels, whether through a standalone module or to be incorporated into particular subjects. The CR Model is a transferable tool that can be used to facilitate reflexivity, to monitor it, and to create opportunities for transformative outcomes. This cannot be guaranteed, as the outcomes will depend on various factors, including for example, the way the facilitation is conducted and the specific content of the programme, but it provides a good foundation for positive outcomes.

This research is part of an ongoing process that, as it continues, reveals more aspects that require a deeper investigation. While this current examination needs to aim specifically towards fulfilling the research objectives set out in Chapter 1, it is important to highlight, as was pointed out in 6.3 above, the need for further research on the development of a fully integrated approach to reflexivity. Further investigation is required to find ways of ensuring that movement through the loops of the CR Model leads to accountable social action. My investigation into the application of reflexivity in professional practice was limited to investigating the experiences of a small number of students and it would be valuable to broaden this and to investigate the options and potentials of developing ‘action’ projects. Further exploring the way in which students who have been a part of the PP module translate their learnings in terms of the community-based learning is envisaged as a future research project. Such further study would add to the value that developing critical reflexivity can offer, especially at an educational level for the development of socially responsible and reflexive professionals working towards a just society. In this respect, not only should arguments be made for the introduction of

reflexive programmes at an institutional level, but also to ensure that sufficient time and resources are allotted for this important work.

In community practice, there appears to be a particular gap for developing reflexive practices in a community context and I believe that reflexivity as viewed by this research could be well incorporated into community interventions as a way to support trainers and to hold them accountable while offering a valuable process and skill set to participants. For this recommendation I am using the term “community” loosely to mean that “it exists when a group of people perceives common needs and problems, acquires a sense of identity and has a common set of objectives” (Roberts, 1972 cited in Swanepoel & De Beer, 2016, p. 83). I recommend further research into the efficacy of applying reflexivity within community-based research, not just regarding the researcher’s reflexivity but as a tool for participants in the research and as a base for authentic dialogue with participants rather than research of or about participants. While this is already a part of a PAR approach for many researchers, I believe opening up the tool for participants and community development workers would add value to initiatives that may claim to be but are not always fully participative.

## **6.5 Limitations and Challenges**

While I refer above to the process of developing critical reflexivity as both ‘complex’ and ‘simple,’ this requires an awareness of the need to be reflexive about the limitations and challenges that are present in applying reflexive approaches through life stories. The complexity of this process and subjective nature of reflexivity requires an in-depth investigation of the processes and various possible outcomes, both beneficial and disadvantageous. As noted above, there are a number of areas in which further research is recommended to provide a fuller picture than presented in this thesis, especially in relation to the transferability and application of critical reflexivity in practice. There is also the danger of believing that using life stories in this way is really a ‘simple’ process. It is accessible, as we all tell stories in our daily lives, but an awareness is needed of the impact of the social nature of life stories. Life stories ‘live in culture’ and therefore reflect the prevailing norms and social constructions of the particular society in which they are told (Mc Adams, 2001, p. 114). This is acknowledged by a reflexive approach that calls for a critical deconstruction of stories and specifically focuses on the impact of dominant discourses; however, the extent of this influence is not to be undermined. For example, stories in Western culture generally take a particular form that begins with the family while other societies talk about life stories in different ways (Mc Adams, 2001). As noted in my paper on critical reflexivity in education (Paper 4, Hindsight and Foresight for Better Insight) critical reflection also will not mean the same thing for everyone and cultural differences and complexities need to be taken into account (Fook & Askeland, 2007). Fook and Askeland (2007) highlight the importance of considering that people may have different views about dialogue,

communication, and knowledge production; and about what is considered important in care and workplace cultures. The authors advise a number of measures that can be put in place to account for these challenges including preparing learners properly and clarifying purposes and procedures. Emotional preparation is also important as personal experiences can be traumatic and damaging. Facilitators need to be continually reflexive and mindful about this, and how to structure a ‘safe’ dialogical space for all requires careful planning and discussion.

Also of significance to this research, particularly as the research participants were students in the educational phase and teenagers in the practice part of the project, is the consideration of my authority. No matter how much I have espoused a participatory and egalitarian relationship with participants, I have to question the reality of this. As Finlay (2002) importantly states: “Preoccupations with collaboration and egalitarianism can result in claims which disguise inequalities actually present” (p. 226). Finlay (2002) also points out that advocated openness to multiple interpretations can also hide the limited and in fact biased nature of our findings. She is of the view that more critical pieces of work do not suggest or claim that it is trustworthy as a result of reflexivity and collaborative methodology (as I have done) and emphasise rather the “contingent, partial, tentative and emergent qualities” of the research (which I have also done) (p. 226). I reflect more on this limited and circular (sometimes paradoxical) nature of reflexivity below; but highlight it here as a potential limitation to my findings. Despite attempts to push my ‘non-expert’ voice into the background, it is apparent and central to this research. However, as Pillow (2010) states that while reflexivity is “not a fix” to our challenges in research, it is “a methodological practice that can enable us to continue to unpack and trouble the doing of our research, while at the same time allowing us to get doctoral research work done” (p. 279).

## **6.6 On Reflection - What about the dark side?**

The core of critical reflexivity is the dialogical space. The value of facilitating safe, reflexive (and creative) spaces for sharing stories and conversations is shown throughout this research in terms of personal and professional growth and insight, relational tolerance and acceptance of diversity, and social accountability. The different spaces that have been open to me throughout this research have added layer upon layer to my knowledge and perceptions of the world. I have shared spaces and stories with fellow students when doing my HP masters, an ongoing journey of dialogue with my supervisor, participating students and teenagers, and have also widened these spaces through writing publications for peer review, and presenting at a number of conferences. During my last formal presentation of this research shortly before finalising this study (and I use the word ‘final’ loosely as this has become an ongoing project in many respects), I presented an overview of my findings at the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) conference (Johannesburg, SA,

November, 2017). I was excited by the positive results that the overall data had yielded and boosted by an idea of reflexivity as invaluable in so many contexts – a life skill, something that everyone *should* know about and “do” (a presumptuous idea). After my presentation I was asked a valuable question by the chair of our session that has stayed with me throughout my final writing and invited a deeper reflexivity on my position: What about the ‘dark side’?

Other researchers have also considered this question and challenge a purely positive view of reflexivity, for example, Fox and Allana (2014), (as cited in Faulkner et al., 2016, p. 206) state: “Some forms of reflexivity are reproductive, repetitious and reinforce existing power relations, while others may be challenging and disruptive”. Other challenges have also been identified in 6.4 above. When the question was asked of me, however, it was more personal and I was struck by the question as it arose within our SA context. I cannot remember the exact wording of the questions that stemmed from the initial enquiry and frame them as best I can: What happens afterwards, when the participants have been strengthened through this process and asked to disrupt the dominant discourses but the outside structures have not been transformed? What happens when the power in those structures is used to punish these same participants? Issues on intersectionality come to the fore in the example that was used: what about a Black women in a male dominated SA academic institution asserting her power? I am not in a position to answer this specific question, but I needed to become much more aware of what happens or may happen once participants step outside the carefully facilitated, safe(?) dialogical spaces. It became more dangerous the more I thought about it:

*what of the dark side, outside,  
spaces where you can't hide,  
places where louder voices reside  
waiting to crush you as you rise?*

I needed to unpack my position and hold myself accountable, to look back on my privileged background. I say throughout this research that I have been reflexive, but on deeper consideration I see that my overall favourable view of reflexivity in terms of ‘increasing’ power and self-confidence as principally positive (always a ‘good thing’), means that I am *still* biased. Probst (2015), in a study questioning the benefits and challenges of reflexivity in research, asks how it is possible to know how or whether a researcher has been “reflexive enough” (p. 39); and I find that this is a question I need to continually ask myself. Cunliffe (2003) also raises important questions about the ability of researchers to really capture our social experiences from a social constructionist perspective as we argue that our realities are continually constructed. If as reflexive researchers we privilege (and advance) our own form of knowledge, are we being truly reflexive? In response, Cunliffe (2003) calls for a *radical-reflexivity* that exposes these issues and highlights the indefinite nature of our

interpretations and theories. This means “revealing how our research is a narrative construction with its own discursive rules and conventions, and is open to scrutiny and different interpretations by readers,” (p. 992). However, Probst (2015) also cites Pillow’s (2003) warning against ‘excessive’ reflexivity, stating that although it does not mean we should stop talking about our positions, we will not solve or escape the problems that arise from our positions or subjectivity by endlessly talking about them either. And further, are we not then focusing too much on ourselves rather than the participants of the study? Probst (2015) and others have described reflexivity as both ‘muddy’ and ‘messy’ (although still very relevant and critical). Finlay (2002), for example, describes the practice of engaging in reflexivity as “perilous, full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails,” and likens the journey of reflexivity to entering uncertain terrain (“a swamp”). The challenge, she says is “to negotiate a path through this complicated landscape – one that exposes the traveler to interesting discoveries while ensuring a route out the other side” (p. 212).

Leibowitz et al. (2012) focus on the importance of learning through discomfort and vulnerability, particularly in a SA context. They consider that learning “not only requires us to tolerate and think about discomforting emotions, but recognizes that these difficult feelings arise when we are faced with issues of difference and otherness” (p. xii). The same applies with reflexivity, it opens us to seeing things differently and acknowledging different perspectives. This is ‘personal’ and not necessarily easy, comfortable or something that will make us happy. Yet at the same time, it is an essential skill and a way of being that is required of us and supports the essence of how we can be accountable in community. Now that I know this, and have ‘seen’ things differently, I cannot go back and nor do I want to. If and when I slide on one of the many slippery slopes, I must reach out again, unpack what is happening, and hold myself accountable to the values that I embrace, find my feet again so that it becomes possible to perform authentically and accountably - to ‘walk the talk’.

It was not that I had not considered the issues of the ‘dark’ and ‘messy’ sides of reflexivity and I did have some answers to these questions as they had been raised in different ways over the research period; but I was not sure whether they were good enough and whether I had in fact been reflexive enough. The answer was different for the different contexts in which the research had been carried out. For example, with the students there had been space for deeper discussions – different types of power on different levels, power through and with, and what did it mean to disrupt discourses? We had explored experiences of ‘interrupting’ rather than ‘disrupting’ discourses as a way to navigate through such a situation. Jackson (2004) in considering Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity finds space for developing agency through ‘subversive repetition.’ She states: “Because subjects are constantly reproduced (through repetition), they are never fully constituted. There is always space for reworking and resisting” (p. 675); and that agency is derived from within the discourses that constitute us as, “[t]o rework categories is to challenge the historicity of them, to

expose the falsehood of their origins” (p. 682). Going back to the students’ life stories and their experiences played a major role in seeing how it was possible to “shift” power and how this happened more easily in some spaces than in others (for example, while at university many students felt more ‘free’ but were more constrained, for example by traditions, when they returned to the family home). We also had discussions about when it felt necessary to take a certain stand and when it felt important to respect other peoples’ values even though they may not be sync with your own. Important ideas that emerged during these discussions was that it was about ‘negotiating’ between what was right in the moment – itself an important reflexive and relational skill, but complex and not always easily implemented.

In the refugee youth project this question was even more difficult, and required much dialogue and reflexivity during the research. Many questions arose because of the very burdensome structural difficulties that are faced by the refugee community in Durban, including dire economic hardship and lack of opportunities, social ostracisation in the form of xenophobia, and a lack of political and institutional support. Reflexive dialogue with my academic supervisor was invaluable here as I felt like giving up after the first workshop when hearing so many stories of despair and hopelessness. I felt my own despair for not really being able to change or do anything about the vast

ness of these problems. Are we facilitating ‘unreasonable’ hope when the structural hardships are remaining solidly in place? Was the intervention really worthwhile for offering psychosocial rather than economic support? How long can confidence and strength last when the outside obstacles are stacking up (they have not improved since implementing the intervention and more stringent policies impacting refugees are in the pipeline)? Ideally we need interventions that do all things, especially with a focus on developmental aspects and transforming structural inequalities, but practically this is not always possible.

The value though, I think, of building personal strength and finding ways for a group to value their collective identity and group support, is in facilitating a way to live through each moment, not to get swallowed up by the despair. In this sense we are facilitating hope in the future, a reason for carrying on. Weingarten (2010), notes the importance of hope in helping people to cope. She also, however, notes that the conditions for facilitating hope are not always present and that it is also difficult to sustain. For this reason she offers the construct of ‘reasonable hope’ that does not set up daunting and unworkable expectations, but instead is “something both sensible and moderate, directing our attention to what is within reach more than what may be desired but unattainable” (p. 7). Reasonable hope, she says, is more about action than feelings, it is also relational rather than individual, and based in working within the present rather than waiting for the future. Although Weingarten (2010) explores the value of reasonable hope in the context of family therapy, I think it fits well in a community context, especially when hardships are so rife that participants experience despair and

hopelessness leading to inaction. The emphasis she places on reasonable hope as a verb is important here, viewing it as “a practice” and “something we do with others” to move towards a better future (p. 8). Perhaps what we are doing here too is *interrupting* structural inequalities and injustices - they may not be giant leaps but are small steps towards building agency and for finding our way to a more just society.

Reed et al. (2012) also call for researchers to share our ‘uncomfortable’ moments so that we can facilitate “critical dialogue about how and why we do our work” in an open way, and “implore” us to “come out...and get messy” (p. 25). Finding ways to facilitate and to keep open reflexive and dialogical spaces (spread them around) – taking small steps and inviting and having open (and sometimes difficult) conversations - still seems vital not just for researchers but also for participants. This research indicates that this is the case, despite the complexities, the discomfort, the messiness and muddiness - and sometimes the dangers (I add the latter with great caution and in the knowledge that this is not for me to decide). Reflexivity is an ongoing process, we need to keep moving back and forward through the loops, building agency bit by bit, so that we can develop ways to navigate and to perform better ‘outside’ these spaces as well as in them. In this sense having a strong theoretical grounding in terms of the CR model and using a narrative life story methodology that is accessible to all provides a compass for navigating through the messiness. The relational nature of the process also provides an answer as collaboration is important, we can perform better together.

As a result of these reflections, I offer my interpretations with caution and in the understanding that I am shaped by my story, but also in the belief that the journey through my story and those of others who have been part of this research has opened the way to continually challenge all that I take for granted. I now hold a different view on how I should conduct research and see it as an ongoing dialogical project. In the end, I understand reflexivity as truly embracing that our realities are constructed over time with others and that this opens for us the possibility to ‘do’ life differently and to have important and new conversations. In this sense I follow Gergen’s (2008) view of what he calls the ‘drama’ of social construction:

[W]hat we take to be the world importantly depends on how we approach it, and how we approach to it depends on the social relationships of which we are part. When fully understood, you will find that constructionist ideas will challenge long honoured words like ‘truth’, ‘objectivity’, ‘reason’, and ‘knowledge.’ Your understanding of yourself – your thoughts, emotions, desires – will also be transformed. Your relations with others will come to have an entirely new meaning. You will see world conflict in a different light (p. 2).



## 6.7 Conclusion

In the end I have come full circle, back to myself and my story, and see that it is always about the story and how we decide to tell it. My story is based in a SA context and I am a part of this landscape, a part of its history and hopefully its future. This research has revealed the possibility and potential for transformation and I have endeavoured to apply these findings within a transformative paradigm, one that has a focus on social justice (Mertens, 2010). I do this despite the apparent complications this may mean for a social constructionist perspective as discussed in Chapter 2. I do this because of my context and my history and in recognition that my positioning is not neutral. Because of the past injustices of the apartheid system, SA is in a process of dynamic change that aims towards transforming itself into a more just and equitable society. The preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of SA (Act 108 of 1996) states that the Constitution was adopted as the supreme law of the land to: “Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental rights” (p. 1). Education in SA can play a pivotal role in ensuring that the possibilities for transformation are made possible. Two particular challenges that have been highlighted as needing urgent responses are those relating to social division and inequality, which are viewed as both detrimental to progress in higher education and as providing “a challenge and motivation for higher education in South Africa to do something extraordinary, to contribute towards a solution or amelioration of social conditions as they stand” (Leibowitz et al., 2012, p. xi). This ideology based on social justice and equality is carried through to the discipline of health promotion. In terms of the Ottawa Charter (November, 1986) health promotion is not just about physical wellbeing but includes, as fundamental conditions, social justice and equity (WHO, 2016).

But, how are these ideals made possible in reality? Developing critical reflexivity through life story work is considered an important starting point and the PP module was developed for this purpose – to develop socially accountable professionals who can have an impact on their environment. The overall goal is intentional and subjective – to provide a foundation for people to move towards a position of social and ethical accountability that involves working towards a more just society. Developing reflexivity can be done on a number of levels and with different purposes in mind, for example: learning how to learn and to think (attaining reflexive skills); or, at a deeper level, *becoming* a reflexive being. As shown in the literature review, there are a multitude of exercises that can be used to foster reflectivity or reflexivity. These exercises act at different levels to develop students’ abilities and reflective/ reflexive skills whether for the specific subject, discipline or research project. However, this research indicates that using life stories, and the deconstruction exercises around these stories, has the potential to take reflexive practice to a deeper level leading to outcomes that are tied to participants lived experience and so are contextually relevant. The individual stories offer themselves as micro stories of how we participate within the bigger picture. Through sharing stories, people are

able to give meaning not only to their own story but also to the broader context in which they live. Better understanding the self can lead to a better understanding of others and the space that we cohabit.

Deconstructing our life stories within the framework of the CR Model opens the very real possibility for change and transformation, for students to become critically reflexive professionals who continually question their assumptions and actions, are mindful of the way that power is negotiated, and are aware of their own and others values. It becomes possible to act in an integrated way with reflexive awareness. Internalising reflexivity in this way and making it a part of our stories and who we are, benefits not only the self but also those around us and the wider society. It moves us a step closer towards achieving our ideological hopes for a more just and equitable society in which we can live and practice our lives ethically and with relational and social awareness – continually and critically appraising ourselves in action with others (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). Facilitating spaces for this to happen in an educational context means that we are creating opportunities for students to think critically about the status quo and injustice, and to act in socially accountable ways. These are opportunities for lifelong learning that will enable students to *be* critically reflexive in future practice and in society at large. If we ‘pay it forward’ in practice, it becomes possible to begin a new way of engaging within our communities.

## References

- Anderson, A. (2005). *The community builder's approach to theory of change: A practical guide to theory and development*. New York: The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change; from [www.theoryofchange.org](http://www.theoryofchange.org)
- Anderson, H., & Swim, S. (1995). Supervision as Collaborative Conversation: Connecting the Voices of Supervisor and Supervisee. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 4(2), 1-13.
- Andreouli, E. (2010). Identity, Positioning and Self-Other Relations. *Papers on Social Representations*, 19, 14.1-14.13. ISSN 1021-5573. <http://www.psych.lse.ac.uk/ppsr/>.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective. *Annual Review Psychology*, 52,1-6.
- Baum, F. E. (2016). Power and glory: applying participatory action research in public health. *Gac Sanit*, 30(6), 405-407.
- Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 0(0), 1 – 16. Published online 3 January 2013. DOI: 10.1177/1468794112468475. <http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/01/03/1468794112468475>
- Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(2), 132-149.
- Bleakley, A. (1999). From Reflective Practice to Holistic Reflexivity. *Studies in Higher Education*, 24(3), 315-330.
- Bohm, D. (1996). *On Dialogue*, Edited by Lee Nichol. London: Routledge.
- Boler, M. (2012). The pedagogy of discomfort as a lens for the CSI Project. In Leibowitz, B., Swartz, L., Bozalek, V., Carolissen, R., Nicholss, L., & Rohleder, P. (Eds) *Community, Self and Identity: Educating South African university students for citizenship*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

- Bolin, A. U., Khrantsova, I. & Saarnio, D. (2005). Using Student Journals to Stimulate Authentic Learning: Balancing Bloom's Cognitive and Affective Domains. *Teaching of Psychology*, 32(3), 154-159.
- Bower, R. (2005). Freire (with Bakhtin) and the Dialogic Classroom Seminar. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 51(4), 368-378.
- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as Narrative. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 71(3), 691-710.
- Chamberlain, S. (2012). Developing Reflection: a practice framework. In Campbell, M. (Ed.), *Collaborative Education: Investing in the future -Proceedings of the 22012 ACEN National Conference*. Perth, 29 October – 2 November, 2012.
- Clandinin, D., & Caine, V. (2008). Narrative Inquiry. In Lisa M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n275>
- Clandinin, D., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Cobb, S. (1976). Social Support as a Moderator of Life Stress. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 38(5), 300-314.
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, Social Support, and the Buffering Hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310-357.
- Connell, J. P., & Kubisch, A. C. (1998). *Applying a Theory of Change Approach to the Evaluation of Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Progress, Prospects, and Problems*. USA: The Aspen Institute. ISBN 0-89843-249-9.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry. *Education Researcher*. Downloaded from <http://er.aera.net> at Pennsylvania State Univ on September 11, 2016.
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. (Act 108 of 1996). Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng.pdf>

- Cosgrove, L., & McHugh, M. C. (2000). Speaking for Ourselves: Feminist Methods and Community Psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(6), 815 – 838.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2002). Critical Pedagogy: Reflexive Dialogical Practice in Management Learning. *Management Learning*, 33(1), 35-61.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2003). Reflexive inquiry in organizational research: Questions and possibilities. *Human Relations*, 56(8), 983-1003.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2004). On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner. *Journal of Management Education*, 28(4), 407-426. DOI: 10.1177/1052562904264440.
- Cunliffe, A. (2008). Orientations to Social Constructionism: Relationally Responsive Social Constructionism and its Implications for Knowledge and Learning. *Management Learning*, 39(2), 123-139.
- Cunliffe, A. L., & Coupland, C. (2011). From hero to villain to hero: Making experience sensible through embodied narrative sensemaking. *Human Relations*, 65(1), 63-88. DOI: 10.1177/0018726711424321.
- Denborough, D. (2014). *Retelling the stories of our lives: Everyday Narrative Therapy to Draw Inspiration and Transform Experience*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- De Vos, A. S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C. B., & Delpont, C.S.L. (2011). *Research at Grassroots: For the social sciences and human services professions*. (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Djuraskovic, I., & Arthur, N. (2010). Heuristic Inquiry: A Personal Journey of Acculturation and Identity Reconstruction. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(6), 1569-1593.
- Door, V. M. (2014). Critical Pedagogy and Reflexivity: The Issue of Ethical Consistency, *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 5(2), 88-99.
- Du Preez, P., Simmonds, S., & Verhoef, A. H. (2016). Rethinking and researching transformation in higher education: A meta-study of South African trends. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1), a2. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.2>. ISSN: (Print) 2415-0991. P 1 -7.

- Ellis, B. H., Miller, A. B., Baldwin, H., & Abdi, S. (2011). New Directions in Refugee Youth Mental Health Services: Overcoming Barriers to Engagement. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma, 4*, 69-85.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An Overview. *Qualitative Social Research, 12*(1), Art. 10.
- Eriksen, M. (2009). Authentic Leadership: Practical Reflexivity, Self-Awareness, and Self-Authorship. *Journal of Management Education*. Doi: 10.1177/1052562909339307.
- Faulkner, S. L., Kaunert, C. A., Kluch, Y., Koc, E. S. & Trotter, S. P. (2016). Using Arts-Based Research Exercises to Foster Reflexivity in Qualitative Research. *Learning Landscapes, 9*(2), 197-212.
- Feucht, F. C., Lunn Brownlee, J. & Schraw, G. (2017). Moving Beyond Reflection: Reflexivity and Epistemic Cognition in Teaching and Teacher Education. *Educational Psychologist, 52*(4), 234-241. DOI: 10.1080/00461520.2017.1350180.
- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research, 2*(2), 209-230.
- Fook, J., & Askeland, G. A. (2007). Challenges of Critical Reflection: ‘Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained.’ *Social Work Education, 1*-14.
- Fook, J., & Gardner, F. (2007). *Practising Critical Reflection: A Resource Handbook*. England: McGraw-Hill, Open University Press. ISBN-13 978 0335 221707 (pb).
- Fook, J., White, S., & Gardner, F. (2006). Critical reflection: a review of contemporary literature and understandings. In S. White, J. Fook & F. Gardner (Eds.), *Critical reflections in health and social care*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Forehand, M. (2005). Bloom’s taxonomy: Original and revised. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. Retrieved 7/6/2010, from [http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Bloom%27s\\_Taxonomy](http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Bloom%27s_Taxonomy)
- Frank, A.W. (2010). *Letting stories breathe: A Social-Narratology*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. (2005). New York: Continuum.
- Gallardo, H. L., Furman, R., & Kulkarni, S. (2009). Explorations of Depression: Poetry and Narrative in Autoethnographic Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 8(3), 287-304.
- Galvin, K., & Prendergast, M. (2016). Introduction. In Kathleen Galvin & Monica Prendergast (Eds.), *Poetic Inquiry II – Seeing, Caring, Understanding: Using Poetry as and for Inquiry*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Gemignani, M. (2017). Toward a Critical Reflexivity in Qualitative Inquiry: Relational and Posthumanist Reflections on Realism, Researcher's Centrality, and Representationalism in Reflexivity. *Qualitative Psychology*, 4(2). 185-198.
- Gergen, K. J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gergen, K. J. (2008). *Social Construction: Revolution in the Making*. (Second Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gergen, K. J. (2009). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*: Oxford: University Press.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1991). Towards reflexive methodologies. In F. Steier (Ed.), *Research and reflexivity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gergen, M. M., & Gergen, K. J. (2006). Narratives in Action. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 112-121.
- Gilbert, A., & Slied, Y. (2009). Reflexivity in the practice of social action: from self-to inter-relational reflexivity. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 39(4), 468-479.
- Gomez, A., Puigvert, L., & Flecha, R. (2011). Critical Communicative Methodology: Informing Real Social Transformation Through Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 235-245.
- Graham, L., Powell, R., & Karam, A. (2011). The Power of Social Connection: Developing and Coordinating Sustainable Support Group Programs for Survivors of Sexual Violence. *Joint project by North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Orange County Rape Crisis Centre*.

- Graham, M. J. (2017). *Reflective Thinking in Social Work: Learning from student narratives*. : London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10, 261-280. DOI: 10.1177/1077800403262360.
- Harpham, T., Grant, E., & Thomas, E. (2002). Measuring social capital within health surveys: key issues. *Health Policy and Planning*, 17(1), 106-111.
- Harre, R., & Fathali, M. M. (2011). Positioning Theory. In Bozatzis, N. & Dragonas, T. (Eds.), *The Discursive Turn in Social Psychology*. Worldshare Books. A Taos Institute Publication. ISBN: 978-1-938552-21-2.
- Hibbert, P., Sillince, J., Diefenback, T., & Culiffe, A. (2014). Relationally Reflexive Practice: A Generative Approach to Theory Development in Qualitative Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 17(3), 278-298.
- Hinett, K. (2002). Developing Reflective Practice in Legal Education. *UK Centre for Legal Education*. Varnava, T. (Ed.). Coventry: University of Warwick. ISBN 1 902730 08 9.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2011). The Constructionist Analytics of Interpretive Practice. In N.K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Hosking, D. M., & Pluut, B. (2010). (Re)constructing Reflexivity: A Relational Constructionist Approach. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(1), 59-75. <http://www.nova.edu/sss/QR/QR15-1/hosking.pdf>
- Jackson, A. Y. (2004). Performativity Identified. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(5), 673-690.
- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435-464.
- Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview. *Theory into Practice*. 41(4), 212 - 218.



- Kroth, M., & Cranton, P. (2014) *'Stories of Transformative Learning'*, International Issues in Adult Education. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, Volume 14, 9.
- Landy, R., Cameron, C., Au, A., Cameron, D., O'Brien, K.K., Robrigado, K., Baxter, L.,...Nixon, S. A. (2016). Educational Strategies to Enhance Reflexivity Among Clinician and Health Professional Students: A Scoping Study. *FQS Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 17(3), Art. 14.
- Leibowitz, B. (2012). Understanding the challenges of the South African higher education landscape. In Leibowitz, B., Swartz, L., Bozalek, V., Carolissen, R., Nicholss, L., & Rohleder, P., (Eds.), *Community, Self an Identity: Educating South African university students for citizenship*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Leibowitz, B., Swartz, L., Bozalek, V., Carolissen, R., Nicholss, L., & Rohleder, P. (2012). *Community, Self an Identity: Educating South African university students for citizenship*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Leonardo, Z. (2004). Critical Social Theory and Transformative Knowledge: The Functions of Criticism in Quality Education. *Educational Researcher*, 33(6), 11-18.
- Levine, S. K. (2011). Art Opens to the World: Expressive Arts and Social Action. In Levine, E. G. & Levine, S. K. (Eds.), *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Loh, J. (2013). Inquiry into Issues of Trusworthiness and Quality in Narrative Studies: A Perspective. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(33), 1 - 15. Retrieved from: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss33/1>.
- Luthan, F., Avolio, B.J., Avey, J.B., & Norman, S.M. (2007). Positive Psychological Capital: Measurement and Relationship with Performance and Satisfaction. *Leadership Institute Faculty Publications*, Paper11. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/leadershipfacpub/11>.
- Mangadu, T. (2014). Empowering Health Promotion Students on the Texas-Mexico Border Through Digital Storytelling: Implications for Public Health in Vulnerable Communities. *TPHA Journal*, 66(3).

- Mattson, M., & Hall, J.G. (2011). Health as Communication Nexus. *Linking Health Communication with Social Support (Chapter 6)*. Kendall Hunt Publishing, ISBN 978-0-7575-5987-7.
- McAdams, D. P. (2001). The Psychology of Life Stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), 100-122.
- McAdams, D. P. (2008). Personal Narratives and the Life Story. In John, Robins, & Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). NY: Gilford Press.
- McArdle, K., & Coutts, N. (2003). A Strong Core of Qualities - a model of the professional educator that moves beyond reflection. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 25(2), 225-237.
- McIlveen, P. (2008). Authoethnography as a method for reflexive research and practice in vocational psychology. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 17(2), 13-20.
- McNiff, S. (2011). From the Studio to the World: How Expressive Arts Therapy Can Help Further Social Change. In Levine, E. G. & Levine, S. K. (Eds.), *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Mertens, D. M. (2010). Transformative Mixed Methods Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), 469-474. DOI: 10.1177/1077800410364612.
- Merriam, S., & Clarke, M. (1991). Learning from Life Experience: What Makes it Significant. In Michael Langenbach (compiler), *32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 74, 5-12.
- Mezirow, J. (2009). An overview of transformative learning. In Knud Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning theorists...in their own words*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. ISBN 0-203-87042-5 Master e-book ISBN.
- Morgan, A. (2000). *What is narrative therapy? An easy-to-read introduction*. Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications. ISBN. 0 9577929 0 5.

- Morley, C. (2015). Critical Reflexivity and Social Work Practice. *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2(5), 281-286.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mulvihill, T. M., & Swaminathan, R. (2012). Nurturing the Imagination: Creativity Processes and Innovative Qualitative Research Projects. *i-manager's Journal on Educational Psychology*, 5(4), 1- 7.
- Nagata, A. L. (2004). Promoting Self-Reflexivity in Intercultural Education. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 8, 139-167.
- Norton, L. (2017). Pathways of Reflection: Creating Voice Through Life Story and Dialogical Poetry. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 18(1). Art. 9.
- Norton, L., and Sliiep, Y. (2017a). A critical reflexive model: Working with life stories in Health Promotion Education. *Unpublished, Accepted for publication SAJHE 32(2) of 2018*.
- Norton, L., and Sliiep, Y. (2017b). The archaeology of research methodology: Life stories in education. *Unpublished, Accepted for publication Qualitative Research in Psychology, 2018*.
- Pierre, E. & Oughton, J. (2007). The Affective Domain: Undiscovered Country. *College Quarterly*. 10(4). Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology.  
<http://www.senecac.on.ca/quarterly/2007-vol110-num04-fall/pierre-oughton.html>.
- Pillow, W. S. (2010). Dangerous Reflexivity: Rigour, responsibility and reflexivity in qualitative research. In Pat Thomson and Melanie Walker (Eds.), *The Routledge Doctoral Student's Companion: Getting to grips with research in Education and the Social Sciences*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pintrich, P. R. (2002). The Role of Metacognitive Knowledge in Learning, Teaching, and Assessing. *Theory into Practice*. 41(4), 219 – 225.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1991). Narrative and Self-Concept. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 1(2 &3), 135-153.

- Portes, A. (1998). Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology. *Annual Review Sociology*, 24,1-24.
- Probst, B. (2015). The Eye Regards Itself: Benefits and Challenges of Reflexivity in Qualitative Social Work Research. *Social Work Research*, 38(1), 37 - 48.
- Prpic, J, K. (2005). Managing academic change through reflexive practice: A quest for new views. *Research and Development in Higher Education*, 399 - 406. [PDF] [www.herdsa.org.au](http://www.herdsa.org.au).
- Reed, S. J., Miller, R. L., Nnawulezi, N.,& Valenti, M. T. (2012). Erecting Closets and Outing Ourselves: Uncomfortable Reflexivity and Community-Based Research. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 40(1), 11-26. DOI: 10.1002/jcop.20491.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publications. [Kindle version].
- Rogers, N. (1993). *The Creative Connection: Expressive arts as healing*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behaviour Books.
- Rule, P. (2004). Dialogic Spaces: Adult education projects and social engagements, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 23(4) 319-334.
- Rule, P. (2009). Bakhtin and Friere: Dialogue, dialectic and boundary learning. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2009.00606.x.
- Russell, G. M.,& Kelly, N. H. (2002). Research as Interacting Dialogical Processes: Implications for Reflexivity. *Forum Qualitative Research*,3(3), Art. 18. para 1 - 47.
- Samman, E., & Santos, M. E. (2009). Agency and Empowerment: A review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence. *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative*. University of Oxford.
- Sinacore, A. L., Blaisure, K. R., Justin, M., Healy, P.,& Brawer, S. (1999). Promoting Reflexivity in the Classroom. *Teaching of Psychology*, 26(4), 267 - 270.

- Skovdal, M., & Abebe, T. (2012). Reflexivity and Dialogue: Methodological and Socio-Ethical Dilemmas in Research with HIV-Affected Children in East Africa. *Ethics, Policy and Environment*, 15(1), 77-96.
- Sliep, Y. (2010). Teaching for transformation: the use of narrative metaphor to develop reflexive professionals. *Acta Academica: Teaching of psychology in South Africa: Supplementum 2*: 109-132.
- Sliep, Y. (2014). Narrative reflexive methodology. Unpublished manuscript.
- Sliep, Y. (2016). Poetry as dialogue: Navigating the storms. In Formenti, L. and West, L. (Eds.), *Stories that make a difference: Exploring the collective, social and political potential of narratives in adult education research..* Italy: Pensa, MultiMedia.
- Sliep, Y., & Gilbert, A. (2007). Promoting Inter-Relational Reflexivity with Psychosocial Workers in Community Work: A Case Study from Burundi. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 2, 293-302. ISSN 1433-0237.
- Sliep, Y., & Kotze, E. (2007). Weaving a learning community by the telling, deconstructing and re-telling of life stories. In Kobus Maree (Ed.) *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*: Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Sliep, Y., & Norton, L. (2016). Trees, poems and drama to create reflexive spaces for peace building in schools. In Sylvester Mphahosa & Alphonse Keasley (Eds.), *Peace education for violence prevention in fragile African societies: What's going to make a difference?*, Africa Institute of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Sliep, Y., Weingarten, K., & Gilbert, A. (2004). Narrative Theatre as an Interactive Community Approach to Mobilizing Collective Action in Northern Uganda. *Families, Systems, & Health*, 22(3), 306-320.
- Suarez-Ortega, M. (2013). Performance, Reflexivity, and Learning Through Biographical-Narrative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(3), 189 - 200.
- Stein, D., & Valters, C. (2012). Understanding Theory of Change in International Development: A Review of Existing Knowledge. Justice and Security Research Programme. ISSN 2051-0926.

- Swanepoel, H. & De Beer, F. (2016). *Community Development: Breaking the cycle of poverty* (Sixth<sup>h</sup> Edition). Cape Town: Juta and Company (Pty) Ltd.
- Taylor, S. S., Rudolph, J. W., & Foldy, E. G. (2008). Teaching Reflective Practice in the Action Science/Action Inquiry Traditions: Key Stages, Concepts and Practices. In Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice. Second Edition*. London: Sage Publications. ISBN 978-1-4129-2029-2.
- van Draanen, J. (2017). Introducing Reflexivity to Evaluation Practice: An In-Depth Case Study. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 38(3). 360-375.
- Vos, H. & Cowan, J. (2009). Reflection and teaching: a taxonomy. University of Twente. <https://doc.utwente.nl>.
- Waghid, Y. (2002). Knowledge production and higher education transformation in South Africa: Towards reflexivity in university teaching, research and community service. *Higher Education*, 43(4), 457-488.
- Waghid, Y. (2009). Universities and Public Goods: In defence of democratic deliberation, compassionate imagining and cosmopolitan justice. In Blitzer, E. (Ed.), *Higher Education in South Africa*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press. DOI: 10.18820/9781920338183/04.
- Watt, D. (2007). On Becoming a Qualitative Researcher: The Value of Reflexivity. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(1), 82 - 101. <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR12-1/watt.pdf>.
- Weingarten, K. (2010). Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Supports. *Family Process*, 49(1), 5-25.
- White, S., Fook, J., & Gardner, F. (2006). Critical reflection: a review of contemporary literature and understandings. In White, S, Fook, J, Gardner, F, (Eds.), *Critical reflection in health and social care*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Woodcock, C. (2005). The Silenced Voice in Literacy: Listening beyond Words to a “Struggling” Adolescent Girl. *Journal of Authentic Learning*, 2(1), 47-60.

World Health Organisation. (2016, August). What is health promotion? Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/features/qa/health-promotion/en/>