CHAPTER 2
IDEOLOGICAL STANCE: THEORETICAL AND
PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The ideological stance taken by a researcher provides a basic set of beliefs and conceptual context that guides the research process. It defines, for the researcher, the nature of the world, the research participant’s place in it and the range of possible relationships to that world (Creswell, 1998:254).

Caelli, Ray and Mill (2003) introduced the term “analytic lens” to specifically refer to the methodological and interpretive presuppositions that influences the researcher’s engagement with the research data. The analytical lens is embedded in the underlying presuppositions about the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the implicit assumptions about what it means to be human (ontology).

The first section of this chapter describes the fundamental assumptions of qualitative research that guided the general research approach of this study (see 2.2). This is followed by three sections that deal with the study’s specific theoretical and philosophical assumptions. These assumptions guided every aspect of the study’s research methodology (see Chapter 3). Since the study is primarily a phenomenological study, the specific concepts, principles and form of phenomenology that were followed are discussed in the first of the three sections (see 2.3). The next section addresses the underlying principles of narratives as a secondary and supportive approach to the phenomenological study (see 2.4). The last section (see 2.5) addresses the arts-based research principles of collages as narrative facilitators since collages were employed in this study as a data collection instrument.
2.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Creswell (1998:15, 20) describes qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions that seek to explore and understand human problems. The various methodological traditions enable the qualitative researcher to build a complex, holistic picture of specific phenomena and the research participants. These pictures are based on the research participants’ perspectives and the researcher’s interpretation. As a result, the researcher always leave a personal mark on a study.

Researchers are integrally and actively involved as instruments in the data collection, data analysis and report processes. They attempt to make sense of human phenomena in terms of the meanings that the research participants attach to it. The basic tasks of qualitative researchers are the following:
- To collect data from the research participants;
- To engage in inductive data analysis with a focus on the personal meanings and experiences of the research participants; and
- To report research findings in an expressive, evocative and persuasive way (Creswell, 1998:14-15).

Qualitative researchers’ basic approach to the research context is characterised by the following:
- They describe and report what is happening and experienced, and write a research report in a literary style;
- They explore relevant research topics that explicate human behaviour and experiences; and
- They view the researcher’s role as a naive, active learner and co-researcher with research participants, rather than as an expert who passes judgement and unilaterally interpret the research participants and phenomenon (Creswell, 1998:15, 17-18).
All research approaches have underlying philosophical assumptions that implicitly guide every aspect of a study. The following aspects are fundamentally important in qualitative research:

- **Ontology.** It refers to the understanding of reality and what it means to be human. In qualitative research it is regarded as subjective, contextual and multiple in nature. Reality is contextually constructed by and between the individuals involved in the research situation (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003; Cohen & Omery, 1994:137; Creswell, 1998:74-78, 254; Laverty, 2003:13; Schurink, 1998:242; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:106);

- **Epistemology.** It refers to the nature and grounds of knowledge. Researchers and research participants are interactively and contextually linked in knowledge construction - an intersubjective epistemology (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003; Cohen & Omery, 1994:137; Creswell, 1998:74-78, 253; Laverty, 2003:13);

- **Axiology.** It refers to the role of values in a study. Qualitative researchers need to acknowledge that every aspect of the research process is value laden. One’s ideological stance and socio-cultural norms play an important role in the research process (Creswell, 1998:74-78, 253);

- **Rhetoric.** It refers to researchers’ use of language. The qualitative research report should be written in an engaging, personal, literary and informal style (Creswell, 1998:74-78, 255); and

- **Methodology.** It refers to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the research process. In qualitative research the process is dialectical and interpretative; the researcher is the research instrument. It implies the use of an emerging research design, inductive reasoning and contextualisation of the research topic (Creswell, 1998:74-78; Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003; Schurink, 1998:242).
Phenomenology has had an important impact on 20th-century thinking because of its focus as a rigorous descriptive approach, and because it offers a method for accessing “subjective” phenomena of human experience. The phenomenological approach has its roots in the philosophical perspectives of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who is generally regarded as the father of phenomenology. He rejected the dominant reductionistic tendencies of the natural sciences. A number of influential thinkers expanded on his ideas, such as Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It is important to keep in mind that phenomenology is a specific research method and a philosophical approach (Creswell, 1998:51-52; Giorgi, 1997:238; Kruger, 1988:27; Morse & Field, 1995:151-152; Valle, King & Halling, 1989:6).

Phenomenology can be defined as the study of lived or existential meanings. It is concerned with the phenomena that are given to experiencing individuals. In other words, phenomenology is the study of phenomena as experienced (Giorgi, 1989:41; Giorgi, 1997:238; Van Manen, 1997:11).

The term “phenomenology” consists of two parts, namely “phenomenon” and “logos”. The concept “phenomenon” comes from the Greek *phaenesthai* which originally meant “to flare up”, “to show itself” or “to appear”. From this it is easy to see that it emerged to currently mean the following: To bring to light; to place in brightness; to show itself in itself; the totality of what lies before us in the light of day. Formally, “phenomenon” refers to the presence of any given precisely as it is experienced. The concept “logos” refers to patterns or structures, but it can also indicate verbal communication that brings to light in a discourse that what has been hidden. Seen together, “phenomenon” and “logos” refers to “what is to be disclosed” and “the disclosing of that” (Giorgi, 1989:41;
A number of concepts and principles are important for a basic understanding of phenomenology. In the following paragraphs I will briefly discuss each of these concepts. This is followed by a discussion of the specific form of phenomenology that I have chosen for this study.

2.3.1 “Back to the things themselves”

Husserl introduced a new way of looking at phenomena, namely to return to the things as they actually appear. From this comes his well-known slogan of “back to the things themselves”. This perspective is in sharp contrast with the positivist view of perception, judgement, experience and thought. Husserl stated that only knowledge which emerged from internal perceptions and internally justified judging satisfies the demands of truth (Kruger, 1988:28; Moustakas, 1994:45-46).

The “things” in Husserl’s expression refer to anything of which one is conscious. He demanded that each experience must be taken in its own right as it shows itself and as one is conscious of it. Instead of limiting the use of “experience” to those things known by means of sense perception, Husserl applied it to anything of which one is conscious. Some of it includes the following: natural objects, emotions, mathematical entities, values, volitions, desires and meanings. He referred to all these things as “phenomena”. Thus, in its original form phenomenology referred to a systematic investigation of the content of consciousness (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:22-23).

An important implication of the notion that phenomenology focuses on “things themselves” is that it attempts to control, as far as possible, all presuppositions. This means that it sets aside presuppositions in order to reach a condition of openness which is not influenced by customs, beliefs, prejudices or theories. It involves a return to experiences in order to obtain descriptions which provide the material for a reflective analysis of the experience (Moustakas, 1994:13, 41; Polkinghorne, 1989:42; Stewart &
Mickunas, 1990:36).

2.3.2 View of “reality”

Phenomenology has brought about a shift away from the subject-object Cartesian duality to a focus on the meaning of an experience as it appears in consciousness. The implication of this shift is that whether the object actually exists or not makes no phenomenological difference at all. The reality of an object in consciousness is reality for the individuals only as long as they believe that they can confirm it - the existential claim of experienced reality. One needs to realise that it is not of great concern whether a certain experience actually happened in exactly the way it was described. The factual accuracy of an account is less important than its plausibility; whether it is true to our living sense of it. In short, phenomenology answers the ontological question by stating that reality is as it is experienced (Creswell, 1998:53; Giorgi, 1989:41, 47; Moustakas, 1994:50, 81; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:106-107; Van Manen, 1997:65).

2.3.3 Phenomenological description

An important characteristic of phenomenological research is that it offers a descriptive, reflective and engaged mode of inquiry. It describes the experience as it is, without reference to causal explanations. It addresses the question what? not why? The research process seeks understanding of the structure of experienced reality (lived experiences) so that one can appreciate and be more sensitive to those involved in these experiences (Giorgi, 1989:41; Morse & Field, 1995:151-152; Polkinghorne, 1989:58; Van Manen, 1997:27).

The phenomenological research process aims to construct rich, evocative, systematic and in-depth descriptions of experiences and meanings as we meet them in the lifeworld. A phenomenological description is judged according to its ability to adequately elucidate some aspect of the lifeworld and to resonate with the readers’ sense of lived life (Polkinghorne, 1989:45; Van Manen, 1997:11,19,27).
This study has adopted a phenomenological psychology perspective (see 2.3.7) that involves the analysis and description of the psychological essence of the data, rather than the philosophical essence as with some other phenomenological approaches. The description of the psychological essence is more context-dependent and more concrete than that of the philosophical essence (Giorgi, 1989:46-48).

2.3.4 Lived experience

“Lived experience” is the actual locus of phenomenological research. Since phenomenology holds that all human science knowledge is ultimately grounded in human experiences, its focus on lived experience provides access to all that can be directly known (Polkinghorne, 1989:45; Van Manen, 1997:36).

But what is “experience”? Phenomenological philosophy describes it as the operation of active processes that encompass and constitute the various contents that become present to awareness. These contents are not limited to objects of sensory awareness, but include those of memory, imagination and feeling. Experience is a reality that results from the openness of human awareness to the world. It cannot be reduced to either the exclusive context of the mental (idealism) or the context of the physical (realism). Rather, the context of experience consists of specific occurrences and its meanings. It means that the structure and dynamics of experience are products of an intrinsic relationship between human beings and the world. The context of experience appears at the intersection of person and world. The implications are the following: Firstly, phenomenology accepts experience as it exists in the individual’s consciousness, and secondly, phenomenology recognises the experiential reality of meanings as well as concrete particulars (Morse & Field, 1995:22; Polkinghorne, 1989:41-42, 51).

Another important characteristic of a lived experience is that it always has the potential to open up further experiences. It has unlimited “horizons” in the sense that there is no absolute or final reality in an experience; one will never be able to completely exhaust an experience. The moment you focus on one meaning, the horizon stretches out again and
The physiognomy of my world arises out of my relations to the world: although we all live in the same world, we all have personal landscapes. People who are depressed or tortured by doubt see an empty and desolate landscape (Kruger, 1988:59).

The “horizon” metaphor can also be used to refer to the context (viewpoint) in which one experiences temporality, spatiality, expectations, emotions and ideas. It includes those things that are within our immediate world and that are part of our understanding. These things are constantly and dynamically in the process of being formed or altered by our awareness of our past and present. Even the things that are beyond our immediate awareness are part of our horizon. In short, this horizon is an integral given with everything that is experienced and you can never completely distance yourself from it. An individual’s horizon is something that moves with him/her, rather than something into which one move. In practice it means that it is very likely that if a specific researcher analyses the same data set after a few years, he/she will see it differently because of growth and changes in his/her viewpoints and understandings over time. A so-called “fusion” of horizons occur when an individual reads the results of another’s work and come to his/her own understanding of the specific phenomenon. This individual’s horizon is brought into play and results in a different reading and understanding of the results; an acknowledgment that understanding has multiple realities and multiple possibilities (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:45-46; Turner, 2003:4-5, 8).

This brings me to a concept which is closely related to lived experience, namely experienced meaning.

**2.3.5 Experienced meaning**

Phenomenological research is concerned with individuals’ awareness of the world and the manner in which they discover meaning. In this regard, the aim of the phenomenological approach is not to focus on matters of fact but to determine what the lived experience of
a specific phenomenon means for an individual. For a phenomenologist, the world is not a system of facts, but rather a system of meanings (Creswell, 1998:51, 53; Kruger, 1988:36-37; Moustakas, 1994:13, 49; Polkinghorne, 1989:44).

A phenomenological researcher attempts to discover and explicate the deeper and fuller meanings in the research participants’ stream of consciousness; as a particular phenomenon is experienced in their lifeworld. Such a researcher attempts to sort, systematise and explicate the various meanings of phenomena. It is a search for what it means to be human in an attempt to discover plausible insight (Giorgi, 1985b:6; Morse & Field, 1995:151-152; Munhall, 1994:158; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:8; Van Manen, 1997:11).

A central notion of the phenomenological perspective is that in all our experiences the world appears to us in a meaningful way; meaning is the limitless matrix within which experiences appear. Thus, nihilism’s claim that the world is meaningless can not be accepted. It is accepted that every experience is filled with various dimensions of meaning. The seemingly meaninglessness of modern life is the result of failure in individuals’ quest to discover any of the meanings which motivate one to a fuller and richer life (Kruger, 1988:37; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:108).

Kruger (1988:21, 63-64) argues that in order to grasp the meaning of experiences for other individuals, one will have to focus on the quality of their experiences. Various dimensions of being human are intertwined in experience qualities: bodiliness, spatiality, temporality and relationality (see 2.3.6 for a discussion of these dimensions).

The “lifeworld” concept is the last one that is important for a basic understanding of phenomenology.
2.3.6 Lifeworld

Earlier I have indicated that a primary aim of the phenomenological approach is to come to an understanding of the meaningful relations implicit in the research participants’ context-bound descriptions of experiences. Husserl introduced the concept “lifeworld” that refers to the everyday context of self-experience. This context is not equivalent to the concrete external environment. Rather, it is the world as experienced by the individual. Life is characterised by a dynamic and continuous concern with a variety of projects, objects, relationships with other individuals, events, situations and our inner world. These aspects are so interrelated that it is impossible to completely isolate any one of them. In this sense individuals are tied to their worlds and are understandable only in their specific contexts (Morse & Field, 1995:152; Moustakas, 1994:14, 48; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:45-46; Valle, King & Halling, 1989:9-10).

The complexity of the lifeworld is revealed in the description and interpretation of lived experiences and the structure of meanings (themes). Four basic existential themes (“existentials”) can be used to describe and understand the lifeworld: Lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), lived space (spatiality), and relationships with others (relationality). These existentials have proven to be especially helpful as guides for reflection in the phenomenological research process. It is important to recognise that these existential themes can be differentiated but not separated. They are all part of the lifeworld’s intricate unity where one theme continuously calls forth the other themes (McLaren, 1999:57; Van Manen, 1997:105).

Lived body (corporeality) refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always present in the world through our bodies; I stand out towards the world in being a body. When we meet other individuals in their world, we meet them first of all through their bodies. In our bodily presence we both reveal and conceal something about ourselves at the same time (Kruger, 1988:40; Van Manen, 1997:103).

Lived time (temporality) is subjective time, in contrast to clock (measured) time.
Returning to the “horizon” metaphor, the temporal dimensions of past, present and future can be seen as the horizons of an individual’s temporal landscape which is present in any situation. Past experiences are part of whom we are in terms of memories or as forgotten experiences. It shapes our being - the way we act in the present, the perspectives we have accepted and made our own, the words we utter and the narratives that tie us to our past. Yet, the past is not a fixed entity. It is dynamic and changes under the influence of the present. As we live everyday towards the future we continuously reinterpret who we once were or who we are now (Van Manen, 1997:104). In the words of Kruger (1988:67) “... the past meets us out of the future”. It is not something that lies behind us.

Lived space (spatiality) is felt space where things have their place and stand in meaningful relation to one another. It refers to the world or personal landscape in which individuals move and find themselves at home. It is the spatial qualities (physiognomies) of the world that cannot be quantitatively measured or described. Socio-cultural conventions associated with space, such as interpersonal bodily space, provide the experience of space with certain qualitative dimensions (Kruger, 1988:59; Van Manen, 1997:102-103).

The world is never perceived as just mine but always as a world shared with others. It is the place where the individual performs all acts directed towards objects, tasks and others. Lived relations (relationality) refer to the relationships that an individual has with others in a shared interpersonal space. The functioning of this space is based on intersubjectivity. In a larger existential sense, individuals find in lived relations some aspects of a meaningful life, with the ultimate meaningful relationship being in the religious experience of the absolute Other (God) (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:127; Van Manen, 1997:104-105).

This concludes the discussion of the most important concepts and principles that are important for a basic understanding of phenomenology. Now, I want to proceed to a discussion of the distinction between different forms of phenomenology. Also, I indicate the specific form of phenomenology that I have chosen for this study.
In order to be truly rigorous in a phenomenologically orientated study, the presence of the human element in the research situation should be taken into account. The researcher should clearly indicate the extent to which he is present in the research process by making explicit the perspective and background from which he proceeds (Kruger, 1988:143; Moustakas, 1994:101).

Phenomenology is a particular approach for viewing the world. However, this does not mean that it is a single unified approach. Rather, phenomenology should be regarded as an approach characterised by a common phenomenological “style” with different identifiable “accents”. The different “accents” are the result of differences in the way that different cultures and academic disciplines view the application and style of phenomenology (Lawler, 1998:107; McLaren, 1999:56).

At present the phenomenological literature provides no clear system to distinguish between the myriad forms of phenomenology. It seems as if each prominent phenomenologist has named and described his/her specific approach without clearly and unambiguously indicating its relation to other similar approaches. The result is a confusing number of “accents” which implicitly overlap to a lesser or greater degree. In the following paragraphs I indicate the most important principles and characteristics of the phenomenological “accent” that I have chosen for this study. It can be described as a blend of “American phenomenology” [as described by Caelli (2000)] and “Phenomenological psychology” [as described by Giorgi (1985b), Kruger (1988) and Polkinghorne (1989)].

In general, at least three culturally influenced and recognisable forms of phenomenology can be identified, namely German, French and American phenomenology. The focus of the German form is on the nature of being and being conscious of phenomena; Martin Heidegger is a prominent representative of this form. The focus of the French form is on embodied existence; as particularly influenced by the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The American form has moved away from a focus on being itself to devote more attention
American phenomenology is characterised by the following: Phenomenological research questions that do not exclusively focus on the pre-reflective experience, but include reflective thoughts and interpretations of the experience; and a phenomenological analysis that describes individuals’ lived experiences within the context of culture (situated meanings) rather than searching for its universal meaning. In other words, the focus of American phenomenology is on the exploration and description of everyday experiences itself; including reflective and previously interpreted descriptions of experiences. In contrast, European phenomenology (the combined German and French forms) uses descriptions of pre-reflective experience as a tool to access phenomena in their primordial form. Further, the American form focuses on studies of the postmodern world where individuals live in order to uncover the meaning of lived experience from their situated perspectives. It holds that our understandings of the world are constructed by the language and traditions of our heritage. This is in contrast to the focus of European phenomenology on the objective, universal aspects of the phenomenon as free as possible from the cultural context. Lastly, the American form is more concerned with understanding than with objective description; a reorientation away from the more critical approach of European phenomenology (Caelli, 2000:367, 369-371, 373-374).

Crotty (in Lawler, 1998:107), argues that the emphasis of American phenomenology to focus on the subjective and individual meaning is consistent with the strong sense of individualism that characterises American culture. Also, he suggests (in Caelli, 2000:372) that its situated focus represents a move away from an objective examination of phenomena; a subjectivist epistemological position that is in contrast to the constructionist position of European phenomenology. The subjectivist epistemological position holds that meaning is being discovered or created anew by each individual, while constructionism holds that knowledge is constructed out of human engagement with objects that are already in the world. Crotty (in McLaren, 1999:60-61) critiques the American approach for lacking objective reasoning. He even goes as far as to state that it upholds a culture of narcissism by focussing on the subjective meaning of experience.
Enough said about American phenomenology. Let’s turn the focus to Phenomenological psychology. This approach is not a sub-field of philosophy. Rather, it is a psychological approach that draws on the philosophical insights of phenomenology. It studies phenomena relevant to psychology and investigates these phenomena in a methodical, systematic and rigorous way. This approach analyses the psychological meanings of specific experiences in particular contexts in a way that is consistent with the basic phenomenological vision. Phenomenological psychologists interpret the expression “back to the things themselves” to mean to go to the everyday world where people are living and experiencing various phenomena in actual situations (Giorgi, 1985a:8; Giorgi, 1997:252; Kruger, 1988:37; Polkinghorne, 1989:43, 51).

The phenomenological psychology approach differs from many other psychological approaches in a number of ways: It is more descriptive than explanatory, more aware of the actual total context, more concrete in its application, and more positive in its articulation of pathology. It accepts individuals’ own descriptions of their world and does not deductively explain it in terms of psychodynamic concepts (Kruger, 1988:221-222).

Phenomenological psychology research attempts to get people to describe and explicate their experiences in order to systematically and rigorously disclose the meaning structures of their lives and behaviours. It focuses on some of the neglected and misunderstood areas of psychology, for example happiness, grief, fear, anxiety and love. These themes are those of which individuals have a vast personal experience but for which psychology has not yet provided an adequate framework of understanding (Kruger, 1988:38).

In summary, it should be clear from the above paragraphs that both the American phenomenology and Phenomenological psychology approaches share a focus on contextualised experiences, and individual meanings and understanding of experiences.
2.4 NARRATIVES

Logical thought has been a dominant instrument of reason in the Western world during the modernistic time period. However, narratives involve another kind of thought that involves the constructing of stories rather than the constructing of logical or inductive arguments (Bruner, 1987:11; Van Niekerk, 1999:12-14; Widdershoven, 1993:16).

The narrative approach leads to a form of understanding that is contextual and temporal. It holds that a real-life event is in a special sense a dramatic event which has the structure of a dramatic narrative. Such an event is most naturally and best communicated as a story. In other words, life is a story to be told. Not only do we tell about our lives in stories but in a significant sense our relationships with others are lived out in narrative form. In understanding what someone else is doing we move towards placing a particular event in the context of storied histories; histories both of the individuals concerned and of the settings in which they act. It would be difficult to underestimate the importance of stories in our lives and the extent to which they serve as vehicles for rendering selves and others intelligible. In short, stories are lived before they are told; they do not analyse, but synthesise (Gergen & Gergen, 1988:17-18; McLaren, 1999:91; Sarbin, 1986:11; Von Eckartsberg, 1989:146-147).

The above ideas lead Sarbin (1986:8, 11, 19) to formulate the narratory principle which states that human beings think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures. All rituals, events and experiences of daily life, including our memories and fantasies, are organised in such a way as to tell stories. This principle operates to provide meaning to the non-systematic encounters and interactions experienced in everyday life.

2.4.1 “Story” and “Narrative”

Before we look at specific aspects of the narrative approach, let’s start with some basic definitions of the concepts “story” and “narrative”. “Story” refers to an account of event
or series of events within distinct temporal and/or spatial boundaries that purposefully bind the events and agents together in an intelligible pattern. People tell stories of their lived experiences. These stories are usually, but not exclusively, shared with others in the form of oral accounts and storytelling. Both the storyteller and the audience listening to a story are important elements of storytelling (Banks-Wallace, 1998:17-18; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:417; Strydom, 2002:31).

The concept “narrative” is usually used within the academic sphere and refers to purposeful, contextually situated and languaged human experiences; in short, life-as-told. It is a symbolised account of human experiences that includes a temporal ordering of events and an effort to coherently present experiences in a personally and culturally plausible manner. Narratives are not only identified in conversation and literature texts but are also present in individuals’ performances - gestures, facial expressions and art objects. These various performances allow multiple points of entry into the ‘texts’ of lived experiences as with each performance we re-experience, re-live, re-construct, re-fashion and re-author our lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:417; Frank, 2003a; McLaren, 1999:91; Rapmund & Moore, 2002:24; Sandelowski, 1991:162-163; White & Epston, 1990:12-13).

Two other concepts that need brief mentioning are “narrator” and “narration”. “Narrator” refers to an individual who is socially positioned to tell stories at given biographical and historical moments. The narrator’s stories is implicitly influenced by and told in the prevailing social context and cultural norms for storytelling, and the audience for which the story is intended (Kruger, 2003:199; Sandelowski, 1991:162).

“Narration” refers to threshold activities that capture the narrator’s interpretation of the interrelationship between the story elements at a liminal place and a fleeting moment in time. Narration amounts to at least three activities: Causal thinking - stories are efforts to explore and explain lives; Historical understanding - stories are retrospective accounts of events; and Moral enterprise - stories are used to justify actions, emotions and thoughts. The aim of narration is to create a languaged account of events that give structure and
meaning to lived experiences. The reframed and re-contextualised lived moments are embodied with unique meanings (Bochner & Ellis, 1995:203, 210; Sarbin, 1986:6-7,12,17; Sandelowski, 1991:162-163).

2.4.2 Structure of narratives

The structure of narratives is based on experiences along a time line. It is influenced by motives, reasons, expectations and memories. Although the relationship between the essential elements is sometimes complex, these are ordered to make the experience cohere. Thus, the narrative is a way of organising the elements of the experience. It brings together mundane facts and fantastic creations, while incorporating time, in having a clear beginning and end, and place. Narratives are one of the primary means by which individuals construct personal continuity of experiences (Crites, 1986:159; Gergen & Gergen, 1986:25; Gergen & Gergen, 1988:22; Keen, 1986:175-176; McLaren, 1999:91; Sarbin, 1986:3,9; White & Epston, 1990:81).

The most essential ingredients of storytelling is the following: Firstly, its contextual situatedness; secondly, its capability to create a sense of temporal direction; and thirdly, to structure events in a coherent way. Stories are situated accounts and not simply expressions of the one “true” story already inside the person. Rather, they are always responsive to the contexts of their production and are functional for the narrator’s specific context. An important aspect of personal stories is its focus on the narrator’s way of speaking to a specific audience in a social situation; particular individuals tell particular stories to particular listeners. In this sense, stories are co-produced and developed within the intersubjective space between narrator and audience. The telling of stories is also shaped by socio-economic and culturally determined cognitive and linguistic processes. Thus, one’s narratives are intertwined with the narratives of those individuals you share your life with. The greater cultural and social narratives determine the way we do things, belief and act within a particular culture (Bruner, 1987:15; Butterwick, 2002:250; Frank, 2003a; Keen, 1986:188; Kruger, 2003:199-203; Langellier, 1989:249,255; Strydom, 2002:177-178).
We can not separate who we have been (history) and who we are (present) from who we imagine we are becoming (future). Stories strive towards internally consistent interpretations of the past-in-the-present, the experienced present and the anticipated-in-the-present future. A temporal ordering renders our cultural and personal existence knowable. Narrative forms reveal individuals’ construction of past and future life events at given moments in time. When shaped as narratives, lives come from somewhere (history) and are going somewhere (future). Stories have ends, but, like reality, are never finally finished (Frank, 2002; McLaren, 1999:91; Rarpmund & Moore, 2002:23; Sandelowski, 1991:164-165; Sarbin, 1986:11-12; Strydom, 2002:178; Widdershoven, 1993:3).

The specific elements of experiences that we remember and select for inclusion in our stories provide an essential structure for the re-construction of coherent stories. Coherence allows the story to flow and give a sense of linearity and even inevitability. The coherence of a story is based on recognisable patterns of events called plots. Central to many plots are human predicaments and attempted resolutions. The relationship among events in a narrative, rather than the events themselves, is primarily responsible for sustaining dramatic engagement. This capacity to create emotional involvement is one of the most phenomenologically salient aspects of the narrative form (Gergen & Gergen, 1986:25-30; Gergen & Gergen, 1988:20-27; McLaren, 1999:91; Sandelowski, 1991:162-163; Sarbin, 1986:3).

In the telling of a story, one is not just giving a coherent account of events. You also claim that this is what “truly” happened. Narrative truth is different from formal natural scientific truths by its emphasis on plausibility rather than objectivity. Stories typically reflect narrative truth in the narrators’ strive for narrative probability (a story that makes sense), narrative fidelity (a story consistent with past experiences and/or stories) and aesthetic finality (a story with satisfactory closure and representational appeal). In a narrative it is not how to know the objective truth that is important, but rather how experience is endowed with meaning (Frank, 2003a; Sandelowski, 1991:164-165).
2.4.3 Roles and functions of stories, narratives and storytelling

The act of storytelling and stories in itself have a number of functions. Firstly, the act of storytelling has the following emancipatory potentials for the narrators:

- It provides a contextual grounding to clarify one’s perspective, understanding, choices, actions, relationships and place within the world;
- It provides a means to establish social bonds with others;
- It provides a means to validate and affirm personal experiences. This can provide the necessary impetus to deal with its negative aspects and to be motivate by its positive aspects;
- It provides a means of venting emotions; and
- It provides an opportunity to critique and resist dominant cultural narratives and to challenge myths and stereotypes (Banks-Wallace, 1998:18-20).

Secondly, stories per se can serve the following general functions: To interpret experiences and make their meanings explicit; to help recap past experiences and actions; to express the coherence of our lives and create identity; and to transfer experiences to new contexts (Widdershoven, 1993:18-19).

2.4.4 Stories as interpretations of life

An important premise of the narrative approach is that stories are interpretations of life, it is attempts to make sense of experiences. A story tells us in a meaningful and intelligible way what a specific aspect or element of life itself is about. Stories are not merely mirror images of life and experiences. The narration process changes the relatively unclear pre-understanding of daily life into a structured and interpreted account of events. It makes explicit the meaning that is implicit in life as it is lived. A story presents us with life as it is lived. As such, life is the basis of the story. But a story is also an articulation of life that gives it a new and richer meaning. In other words, experiences elicit stories and stories articulate and modify experiences (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000:61; Widdershoven, 1993:4-9).
2.4.5 Stories and personal identity

Stories are an important part of one’s personal identity. They tell us who we are, they create identities and they influence how we manage our lives. The concept “narrative identity” refers to the implicit unity of a person’s life as it is experienced and explicitly articulated in stories that express this experience. Stories take shape on the occasions of their use, as parts of the personal identity for which they serve as resources. Retrospective and future stories provide the context for a sense of personal identity in the present. Also, stories about what you have experienced are influenced by those of others. You become aware of the significance of personal experiences by telling stories about them and fusing it with others’ stories. As a result, many personal ideas are derived from ideas in other persons’ stories. Thus, personal identity is the result of an interaction between personal experiences and personal stories, complexly entwined with others’ stories (Frank, 2003a; Rapmund & Moore, 2002:23; Strydom, 2002:182-183; Widdershoven, 1993:6-9).

2.4.6 Stories and lived experiences

Lastly, let’s turn to the role of “lived experience” in stories and narratives. In this regard the concept “experience” refers to an actual event that is incorporated into a first-person story. Many things are sensed during life events but only those that are attended to are experienced. One needs to keep in mind that some aspects of life events only slowly present themselves as the narrator becomes aware of its significance for the story. This makes “experience” a narrative construct that is constantly changing. Some aspects that initially seemed important may later become trivial while others gradually move into the focal point. It links to the concept “narratability” that refers to the phenomenon of recognising and affirming some experiences as being worth telling. In order to give life a sense of meaning and continuity, we include the narratable lived experiences in systematic stories. However, a story can never completely encompass the full richness of our lived experiences. There will always be emotions, thoughts and actions not fully accounted for in the story. Some experiences may be too complex or too vague to currently be included in a story. Alternatively, we may lack adequate expressive

In closing, it can be said that life is both more and less than a story. It is “more” in that it is the basis of a variety of stories, but it is at the same time “less” in that it is unfinished and unclear as long as it is not storied in some or other expressive way (Widdershoven, 1993:19).

2.5 ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

The concept “epistemological silence” refers to the knowledge context where one may have knowledge on a level that is not available to your linguistic competency. The experience of something that appears inexpressible within the context of verbal and textual discourse may be expressible in other forms of discourse, such as music and fine art objects (Van Manen, 1997:113-114).

Increasingly, human scientists are realising that exclusively textual representations of life experiences do not adequately reflect the complexity of human existence. This has facilitated an interest in stretching the boundaries of qualitative research to include arts-based research of literary genres (for example poetry and drama), as well as non-textual visual modes of representation (for example collages, drawings and photographs) (Butler-Kisber, 2002:229-230; White & Epston, 1990:34).

2.5.1 Creative expression

Arts-based research involves the use of aesthetic qualities and artistic media in research endeavours to give expression to lived experiences, emotions and thoughts. It opens up new areas and opportunities for experimentation with alternative approaches that combine aesthetic sensibilities and post-positivistic forms of expression. In arts-based research the expression of meaning becomes central compared to positivistic approaches where meaning is stated (Barone & Eisner, 1997:76; Butterwick, 2002:243).
The rationale behind the inclusion of arts-based representations in qualitative research is that form mediates understanding. The content of an individual’s emotions and thoughts is expanded and enriched by the form the he/she has chosen to represent it with. Artistic forms are recognised as an effective vehicle to give expression to emotions, thoughts and experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2002:230; Fieldnotes, 16 December 2002; McLaren, 1999:86-87).

Artistic social texts provide a different kind of knowing than that offered by self-report questionnaires or lengthy interviews. It acknowledges the depth, intensity and complexity of experiences. Often knowing cannot find adequate expression in words alone as it goes beyond the abilities of verbal language to convey that experiences. Rarely are we left empty-handed and unmoved when we create artistically to learn more about ourselves and our lifeworlds (Ball, 2002:18-20; Barry, 1996:412; Butler-Kisber, 2002:232).

Every artistic form, whether it be visual, tactile, auditory or kinesthetic texts, is not merely representational or imitational of some event in the world. Rather, it gives shape to the artist’s lived experience as it transcends the experiential world in a transformed reflective existence. This concretisation of lived experiences is a manifestation of one’s “creativity”. Creativity manifests through art as a dialectic between the past and future, as experienced in the present. It allows for the exploration of an experience’s dynamic meaning and impact within a temporal context (Jones, 1989:133; Leibowitz-Levy, 2003; Van Manen, 1997:74, 97).

In order for any artistic form to communicate effectively, a community of perceiving subjects is required. Such a community is characterised by a common understanding of a general “meaning horizon”. The performance of an expressive act brings one’s personal world into the context of a mutual understanding in order to communicate to others how it is to exist in a shared world. However, authentic creativity requires that the expressive form must also institute new meanings and a newly integrated meaning horizon. Creative expression establishes its own context of significance in relation to a familiar meaning horizon, which itself is changed by virtue of having been brought to expression. The
possibility exists that some audiences may remain so committed to its established interpretations of what is expressed that they may fail to recognise or acknowledge the transformed meaning horizon (Barone & Eisner, 1997:76; Jones, 1989:1-2, 140, 144).

The most important advantages of an arts-based research approach are the following:
- It provides a non-verbal way for symbolic communication, sharing and expression of experiences that are difficult to express in verbal form. This allows for the expression of lived experiences’ complexities in a “language” that is comfortable for the individual;
- It facilitates the use of symbols that externalise thoughts and feelings. This enables an effective processing of emotionally and cognitively overwhelming experiences;
- It facilitates the process of verbalising lived experiences. As an individual artistically expresses inner experiences, it often happens that they also find it easier to verbally articulate lived experiences;
- It provides a non-threatening setting that allows individuals to explore their experiences in whatever way they feel appropriate and comfortable with. The freedom to use any suitable art medium provides individuals with a less threatening context to express their lived experiences;
- It is a creative process that is suitable for all ages;
- Its creative nature captures attention;
- The end product is often concrete and can usually be archived for a long time;
- It evokes emotional responses that bring the reader, listener and/or viewer of the research results closer to the participants’ lived experiences;
- It permits alternative and/or silent “voices” to be heard; and
- It tends to generate descriptions that can simultaneously complement and challenge understandings formed through more conventional means.

An important limitation of an arts-based research approach is that artistic expressions may be difficult to interpret. However, an accompanying narrative can significantly facilitate the interpretation process (Arguile, 1992:140; Art Therapy, 2001; Barry, 1996:413; Butler-Kisber, 2002:230; Creswell, 1994:150-151; Landgarten, 1993:74-75; Lefler Brunick, 1999:15-17; Leibowitz-Levy, 2003; Rust, 1992:161-162; Waller & Dalley,
2.5.2 Visual art

It seems that all individuals have a latent capacity to express themselves in visual art forms. Images are an integral part of who we are. They enable us to see, think, communicate and make sense of our lifeworlds. Like words, images can be used, construed and read in different ways. Just think of how images are used to question, imagine, critique, theorise, hurt, unite, relate, narrate, explain, teach, represent, establish identity and express the full range of human emotions and experiences. Beyond the range of our linguistic competency in verbal and textual expressions there is a wider domain of lived experiences that can be represented as visual images. The way that images create meaning and represent sense-making is a dynamic process that involves interaction between the social and personal aspects in any given context. Symbolic visual images offer an effective mode to achieve the transformation of cognitively fragmented, unintegrated and unprocessed affective and sensory lived experiences into processed and logical thoughts (Leibowitz-Levy, 2003; McLaren, 1999:11-12, 64; Weber, 2002a).

Visual images can be used in multiple ways within a research context:
- Images as data. The data set to be analysed comprises of images (for example movies and drawings);
- Images to elicit data. The data to be analysed is elicited through images (for example photo-elicitation and Rorschach inkblots);
- Images as documentation. The process of data collection is visually recorded (for example using a video camera to record an interview or behavioural patterns);
- Images as mode of interpretation and/or representation. The results of the data analysis process are image-based (for example making a poster to report interview data);
- Images as interview facilitators. It provides a way of establishing rapport in the research interview; the interviewee interprets and comments on self-chosen images. The narrative is guided by images that serve as triggers for memory. Self-chosen
visual images provide an entry point into the individual’s viewpoints (Barry, 1996:421; Radley & Taylor, 2003; Weber, 2002b).

2.5.3 Collages

Collages can be a fast and economical way of evoking descriptive accounts. It enables individuals to contextualise events and lived experiences within the prevalent cultural sphere. Collage images are taken from the available printed media and other visual images, such as personal photographs and drawings. These artifacts are part of a knowledge base that is located in a context of shared discourse traditions and personal experiences of the world. This postmodern way of thinking implies an approach that finds personal meanings within the context/s that situate the individual in the world. The creation of a collage simultaneously emphasises personal meanings, history, culture and tradition in such a way as to bring representations of the self (the internal-personal) and society (the external-contextual) to a common place. Self and society are not dichotomous, but rather characterised by many diverse voices and themes within a shared composition (Barry, 1996:424; Denzin, 2000:258; Finley, 2001:17).

Collage-making integrates physical and mental activities. Literally and figuratively the collage-maker holds in his/her hands the fibres of personal life experiences. A search in the printed media representations of popular culture is conducted until an image is identified that represents an aspect of the lived experience. Such an image is then thoroughly considered to determine it’s suitability and appropriateness. If some level of satisfaction is reached, it is carefully cut from its originating (con)text, while being aware, often only vaguely, of having separated it from another artist’s context and meaning. Free from its contextual source, the image is closely examined in search of naming its possible referential themes and stories. This is an attempt to fit the new piece into the story one wants to tell. Thus, collage images have been removed from their original sources and recontextualised within a newly created

“... works of art are the means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationships and participation than our own” (Dewey, 1956:333)
visual text. In a sense, the images now “deny” their original contexts and elicit new meanings in relation to the other recontextualised images. The reliance on intuitive and imaginative thinking about the use of images, draws collage-making into the realm of working knowledge. “Working knowledge” refers to knowledge gained in practice. Kinesthetic correctness and the interplay between theoretical (mind) and empirical (hand) aspects are used to solve practical problems. This implies that working knowledge is an integral component of collage-making. Collage images are carefully selected for their appropriateness to available space and other images; different types of paper are more or less fragile; adhesives work well with some materials and not others; and a gentle breath can lift a snippet of paper into its resting place (Finley, 2001:19-20).

The collage images in a specific collage take form as pieces of a composition; the image arrangement according to size, colour, shape and meaning integrates it into an overall design. Images are guided to their specific place on the collage by the collagist’s intuitive and imaginative thinking, and a manipulation of image associations. Images are grouped so that they can be seen individually and in the context of their arrangement on the collage. They stimulate one’s imagination to recognise and notice what is not present in an image or group of images, as well as to explore why some parts of certain images have been removed (Barry, 1996:412; Finley, 2001:19-20, 25).

Within arts-based research contexts, collages provide a metaphoric language of its own that hold certain advantages and perform specific functions for the collagist:
- It concretises abstract aspects of a lived experience;
- It serves as an agent for recall;
- It provides a means to visually express emotions and lived experiences for which mere words are inadequate;
- It allows individuals to gain a deeper understanding of themselves as they should be able to effectively identify with the self-chosen images;
- It serves as a transitional object. Some of the tension associated with the verbalisation of lived experiences can be more easily tolerated. The collage is literally and figuratively between the collagist and the researcher where it acts as a vehicle through
which complex, difficult and intensely emotional experiences can be expressed; and
- Self-chosen images provide individuals with a highly individualised and rich symbolic vocabulary for self-expression (Landgarten, 1993:1-2, 74-75; Waller & Dalley, 1992:8).

Collages are useful research instruments to facilitate self-reflection and to provide others with a shared entry point for discussion. The images invite others to engage in a dialogue with the visual text through the possibilities of allegories and metaphors. Such dialogues create a space for learning and the formulation of multiple interpretations; it leads to the production of knowledge. The interpretations offered by perceiving others may result in alternative reconstructions of the collagist’s experiences, emotions and thoughts. Whether one is the collagist or a perceiver, you come to the visual text with your own mental history and relationships. As one engages with the visual text as active meaning maker, your lifeworld assumptions and experiences are included into the narration of understanding. Thus, regardless of one’s relationship to the visual text, you are a partner in the meaning making process. This notion of perceiver-interpreter challenges counter-notions of art-making as instances of individualised production and expert “knowing”. Rather, through their interpretive acts, perceiver-interpreters come to the visual text on an equal footing with its creator. This is true even if perceiver-interpreters create meanings that are different to the collagist’s intended meaning. No interpretation of a visual text is ultimately definitive. Rather, it is intersubjectively constructed (Barry, 1996:412-413; Finley, 2001:20-21).

The next chapter will describe the research methodology that was followed in this study.