

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."
T.S. Elliot.

CHAPTER 5: THE RESEARCH JOURNEY – GOING BEHIND THE SCENES

When I first saw it, it took less than 5 seconds to find myself laughing so hard that tears came out of my eyes. In my delight, I emailed it to a bunch of friends and it became a hot topic of interest and humour for about two weeks before fading away as a fond memory. The heading on the sketch I am referring to (see Annexure E) communicated a comic truth that was paradoxically both obscure and self-evident. A good and unexpected laugh is virtually guaranteed. I got this playful depiction of research from a link on GooglePlus™ in an offbeat moment of diverging from work through play. The two pictures it contains contrast the “public perception of science” with “science in reality.” What really grabbed me about the first depiction was its simplicity, confidence and focus. Get a research idea, feel intrigued, amused and motivated, and then get it done! Wow! I want that kind of focus, simplicity and yes, results. The confidence contained in it is remarkable, in a similar fashion to a well-known phrase: “Those who say it can’t be done, step aside for those who are already doing it!” It’s the kind of pop psychology pep talk that we all love, but most conscious people share the niggling feeling that it is over simplified and devoid of the hard stuff that makes life both tough as well as satisfying.

The second depiction of science in reality is, of course, the one that draws the tears (I’m leaving the reference to tears purposefully ambiguous). It starts off with confidence, it gets stuck, it goes into loops, more loops, it discovers that other people have indeed said these things and confirms that the idea was never that original. It indeed leads to swearing. And it ends with a greater degree of tentativeness than certainty. This, my dear reader, was my research journey, the details of which I will share with you in this chapter. But, just to make up for the swear words in the addendum, let me try and sound academic for a moment.

Confessional tales – going backstage

There is a growing realization among ethnographers and autoethnographers that much of what happens backstage to the research process is not only relevant to methodology, but also offers relevant insight to the research topic (Sparkes, 2002; Ellis & Bochner, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Writing only about the spectacular views and vistas from mountaintops reveals something about mountains, sure, but what about the hike, the gruelling climb, the sweat, the swollen ankles, and the people around you that give you a back pat? In the words of Warren and Karner (2005), we need to “[k]eep in mind that qualitative writing differs from quantitative writing in that it is an integral part of understanding the 'story' of the data rather than just the final phase” (p. 219).

In qualitative research, this genre, commonly referred to as ‘confessional tales’, is gaining traction as a way to “foreground” important methodological considerations, rather than keeping it as a parentheses to the research. For one, researchers in this area do away with the simplistic and idealistic pictures of research that are often held as the public perception of science. Sparkes (2002) suggests: Thus, the ubiquitous, disembodied voice of the realist tale is replaced by the personal voice of the author, announcing, “Here I am. This happened to me and this is how I felt, reacted and coped. Walk in my shoes for a while (p. 59).

In adopting this growing tradition of giving this “backstage story,” or the hiker’s journal, I wish to accomplish three goals and have structured this chapter accordingly. Firstly, I want to reflexively give an account of the research process that serves as a research audit, what Schurink (personal communication) refers to as an audit trail. By doing this, I hope that light will be shed on the research findings, the critical (2011) methodological decisions. This is contained in the research tale that makes up Section 1 of this chapter. Secondly, in Section 2, I aim to explain and demonstrate some of the analysis that supported the writing of chapter 4. In developing the creative non-fiction account, a great deal of data was considered and purposefully interwoven into the narrative. Section 2 therefore gives a detailed description of this process while comparing this to standing literature and theory, as is suggested by Anderson (2006) and Chang (2008). Finally, and, to my mind, probably most importantly, Section 3 in this chapter will reflect on the meta-narrative of this

research. Completing a dissertation is hard work, work that I attempted to turn into play. This research study in itself is therefore a demonstration of play at work and not just an empty container, devoid of knowledge on play at work. This section briefly explores what I've learned regarding that, and offers some suggestions as to how we can integrate play and work more effectively.

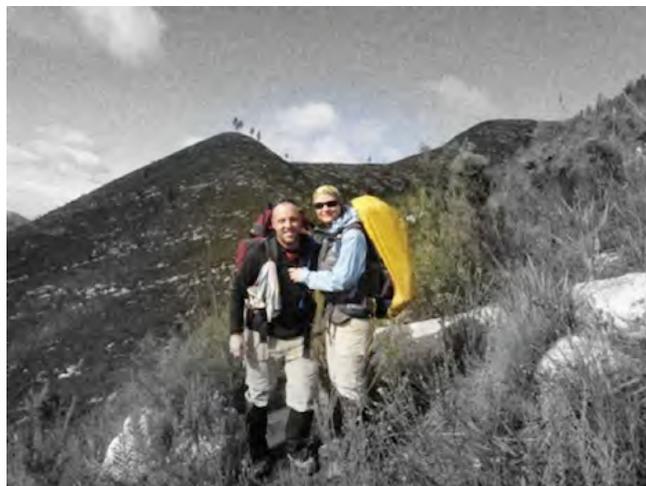
1. A story from a hiker's journal (or "not just the photos, please")

1.1. First year, short-cuts and a walk in the park

A hike starts with a planning process that feels enthusiastic, bold, and adventurous. It's kind of magical in that we forget the pains of the previous hike. We start off by identifying a few possible dates, calling up a bunch of pals (most of whom are keen), browsing through old photos and a new outdoor magazine, and having our first meeting at a local coffee shop. We enthusiastically share our plans and traverse over the hills and through the valleys of our past adventures.

Starting with a Master's study in Industrial Psychology was similar. The most difficult thing was to get the timing right. As someone who works full-time, it needed to coincide with the right career moves. For me, this was in 2007 when I changed jobs into a career in facilitation, something that would eventually teach me a lot about play, and an incredible amount about myself.

Picture 3. Me and Anne-Marie on a hike in the Tsitsikamma



After my honours degree, which I completed in 2003, I promised myself something. “Self,” I said. “Thou shalt not do a master’s degree only for that coveted piece of paper.” Novelty and idealism, mixed up with a little bit of philosophy, have been some of my traits and values since I received a brain (which was shortly after puberty at the age of 17). Back in 2003, I made the promise to only do another degree in order to really make a difference. I wanted a masters-study to mean something to me personally, and to be a reflection of some worthwhile contribution.

By 2007, the idealism had started to erode, and it dawned on me that time was running out. Most of my classmates who decided to make a career of Industrial Psychology had already completed their degrees and had obtained registration as industrial psychologists. I have always been one of the bright kids, I thought. One of the ones that showed promise, people would say. And although I was far ahead in my career in comparison to my classmates, I was starting to feel behind. That feeling, plus the window of opportunity in 2007 of starting a career in the spaces of employee wellness and organisational renewal, felt like reason serendipity. I have for a long time really valued the principles of using our God-given opportunities, talents, passions and callings, responsibly and productively. I applied for the Master’s degree at North-West University. I was accepted and started the coursework in 2008.

The first year consisted mainly out of examined modules. I found the subjects, assignments and exams manageable, even easy. Oh, the joys of structure, demarcated material, study notes and frequent deadlines. At the age of 29, I was one of the older kids in class, and although I connected well with the juniors, the difference in experience, motivation and contribution between them and the few seniors, was obvious. In my mind, most of them completed this degree, not out of a conviction, but because, firstly, it would guarantee them greater job opportunities, and secondly, they had the brains to do it. This may sound judgemental, and it isn’t meant as a criticism. I thoroughly enjoyed my classmates and became buddies with many of them. They were great fun, bright and hard-working. My observation is on the conveyer-belt mentality about academic progress that has become mainstream (Robinson, 2006). I was also caught in it, albeit a bit delayed and despite my philosophical rationalisations to the contrary. The tension of wanting to do something

meaningful and just getting the degree was working its conflict in me constantly. This is similar to the commercial Everest Climber who does not love the mountain, or nature, or the Sherpas, but loves the photo of the summit, thoroughly criticised by renowned climbers such as Edmund Hilary (Doran, 2000). I wanted to love the mountain. But I was also desperate for that photo of the summit.

Throughout that first year, I was searching for a topic. Engagement, meaning in life, career orientations, and sense of coherence were all early contenders. I even went as far as getting approvals for using data from surveys and previous studies in my organisation. Yes, I started off not even thinking that a qualitative study was an option. The recipes of doing quantitative master's studies are well-developed and ingrained into our academic departments. Even the templates for a research proposal that we were provided with were explicitly aimed at positivist quantitative science. After deciding on a qualitative study some time later, I had to dig to find those templates, and even then, their structure better resembled quantitative studies.

That year, together with the five years of graduate and honours studies, thoroughly baptised me into quantitative, positivist science with its accompanying statistical methods. Qualitative research felt like something that was dealt with as a necessity, like peas in a good old South-African meal. It was hardly ever treated as the main course. Words like post-positivism, structuralism, and interpretivism were far removed from the academic vocabulary that we heard in those years.

So I simply thought about topics that sounded meaningful and significant, and then started looking for the necessary shortcuts. Where can I find data? I asked this question even before I started asking more fundamental questions, like "what can I possibly learn?" From the conversations with my peers, I wasn't the only one. Beyond earning a salary, people who were already working were privileged for one additional reason; we had access to data, or so everyone thought. Those who were working in psychometric units in their organisations were the luckiest of them all. Everyone was looking for shortcuts. And towards the end of 2008, I found one - a large amount of data on engagement, sense of coherence and employee performance. After having the data, I thought I could more easily deduce what kind of research questions it could answer.

But somehow, towards the end of that year, I started hearing the voices of reason. A younger self started asking questions about my love for the mountain. The accusation of feeling fixed on that summit snapshot started to hit home. And in a state of critical reflection, my enthusiasm for the summit and my momentum along the quickest path up pushed any resolve into dormancy. Not knowing what I loved, not knowing where to start, together with bad tendencies to postpone and procrastinate put me to sleep for another year.

1.2. The mountain coming to me

In a different context, there is the famous Muslim idiom that goes: “If Mohammed will not go to the mountain, the mountain must come to Mohammed.” I have never spoken to a Muslim about what this means, but to me, it means one of two things. Firstly, we need to bring the kind of experiences we seek closer to where we find ourselves at the moment. And secondly, there is simply no escaping destiny. Both of these, possibly wrong, interpretations found expression in how I came to my research topic.

For a large portion of 2009, I barely thought about research. On the occasions that I did think about it, my thoughts were mainly about how much time I had left to do it. The most significant shift that occurred during that time was that I started thinking about bringing research closer to my immediate context. It made so much more sense to turn work into an opportunity to learn something. This was more than just another shortcut. It contained a conviction that knowledge was all around us. In the mundane aspects of our lives, there was goodness. The mountain didn't need to be far away.

The seeds for a more naturalistic, qualitative study were planted and notably confirmed by Prof. Johann Coetzee and Prof. Frans Cilliers, with whom I interacted for work-related reasons during the preceding months. Towards the middle of that year, I started feeling a little more urgent, and thought about waking up. I contacted another professor, Prof. Joppie Van Graan, who lectured a few classes back in 2008. I scheduled a meeting to talk about research ideas. I also emailed him with a lengthy letter about some of my preliminary questions and met with him a few weeks later. At that point, I pitched ideas about personal insight and wellness, positive

organisational scholarship and organisational ethics. It felt close enough to my work, but it was still rough around the edges. The normally enthused and energised professor seemed lukewarm about my ideas. He answered my arguments with a whole bunch of counter-suggestions and I walked away feeling lost and confused. I still hadn't thought about methodology and didn't have the first clue of how to get started on finalising a research proposal. I was turning a molehill into a mountain. And that was true for the rest of 2009, during which I apparently resolved to not resolve.

I ended 2009 with a profound sense of failure. I remember communicating this to the people around me. Some of my colleagues were supportive, others tried some positive thinking techniques, and Anne-Marie suggested we take a road-trip to the West Coast for some unwinding and recuperation. I did not want pep talks. I wanted to be angry, mostly at myself for allowing an opportunity to pass by. But it was anger with no direction. I still did not know what to do or how to do it. The close to four different meetings I had had with professors and work contacts left me with a plethora of ideas. Every single research book I had contained volumes on research designs, methodology, surveys, statistical analysis, and more, but practical ideas about qualitative research were still far removed from the conversation.

The West Coast was magical. Anne-Marie and I visited Saldana Bay and Paternoster for a few days, attending a wedding, and then camped for 10 days in an isolated area in the Northern Cederberg, close to Clanwilliam. We read, drank caipirinhas and did nothing. I read a profound book about hiking in Mount Everest, written by Jon Krakauer. The book is titled "Into thin air," and I resolved to not allow for more casualties on the mountain of my dissertation. I came back in 2010 feeling rested and restored. The fire was back, but I still had to find the wood to burn, a process that would take me the greatest part of 2010.

I started off 2010 with some renewed personal discipline, which lasted until March and made me feel fantastic. I journaled, exercised, and adopted a personal management system that borrowed a lot of ideas from game design (Shea, 2010). These ideas sparked an interest, and 2010 marked the start of a more explicit curiosity about play at work. I have always been into play, big time. I'm a joker, a fun guy. I love laughing and people describe me as a person who whistles while he works. But

to explicitly think about these ideas as play, and to ask how play can be injected into work and workplace felt like an incredibly novel idea. I started making the links everywhere. I looked in the past, and I looked in the present, and I found plenty of moments in which the positive impact of play on workshop outcomes was undeniable. I saw it in smaller things, such as people describing the training games and icebreakers, normally positioned as peripheral to workshops, as their personal highlights, and the bigger things, such as uncovering a major team obstacle through a creative play exercise. And then there was the day that we as a facilitator team were battling with our own experiences of burnout and disengagement, when a mentor and play facilitator reminded us to “play more” (see the Prologue).

Bang! It hit me. The topic of play was wanting to find me. It spoke to me deeply, like the beating of an African drum that, when it strikes the right rhythm, communicates not with our ears but with our bones. Our arms and legs know and understand the aesthetic long before we can articulate it - a kind of pre-verbal knowing. I felt excited and inspired. The topic felt new and fresh, and I even wanted to patent the idea. Aside from explicit play therapy, the idea of play and play-based methods as a way to renew our organisations and rejuvenate ourselves felt different. In May 2010, I contacted Prof. Johann Coetzee again to discuss a fresh set of ideas and a request for him to be my study leader. Prof. Johann has been an encourager and inspiration to me in many occasions before. He is also a person whose style is characterised by quirky comments, like “drop the pose, we know you are faking it,” and “feel with your mind, think with your senses.” Johann understood something about play, and I believed that having him as a study leader would be invaluable to my research. On the other hand, I understood that our informal relationship would be changed into one where deadlines, check-ups and mutual expectations were more prevalent. Prof. Johann would get to know me as a student, and I felt uncomfortable about this. Although my general demeanor is one of confidence, intelligence and clarity, as a student I possess qualities such as inferiority, lack of ambition and procrastination more often than not. Prof. Johann might see that I was faking it.

1.3. Orienteering and finding north

Despite my anxieties, Johann was very agreeable and supportive. I came away from the meeting inspired. He agreed to be my study leader, we spoke about

timelines, and then, he used a word that I have never heard.

“Write it up autoethnographically, writing subjectively about your own experiences and using yourself as both research topic as well as instrument.” He could just as well have said “Γράψτε επάνω αυτο εθνογραφικά, γράφοντας υποκειμενικά για τις δικές σας εμπειρίες και με τον εαυτό σου καθώς και οι δύο το θέμα έρευνας, καθώς και μέσο.”²³.

Yet, I felt motivated, and inspired. I was going to do a qualitative research study on play at work, using autoethnography as my method. Despite not knowing what it meant, I thought that it would allow for a natural blending of my actual work with the dissertation, as well as the opportunity to do something meaningful. This whole business of autoethnography felt unique and novel, two values I hold dear. Over the next few weeks, I went through literature about autoethnography, ethnography, and grounded theory like a mountain lion through mincemeat. It wasn't all that easy to digest, but it opened up a whole new world to me, one I had only heard about. Postmodern epistemologies and ontologies, which in many spheres of life made incredible sense to me, found a hook in this exempted professional compartment of my life, and while I have had tremendous uncertainties and conflicts after that, I have never felt the need to turn back.

When I met with Johann in May, he encouraged me to find a field supervisor – someone to whom I had access that could give me more day-to-day guidance for the study. A week or two later, I phoned the person I thought was perfect for the job. All the play-methods we were using in our workshop had great legitimacy and prevalence in our organisation because of the pioneering effort of a remarkable man – Dr. Mias de Klerk. Mias agreed to assist and I felt surrounded by giants. I was no longer the “older kid” in class. I was the pleb. But the initial excitement turned on me rather quickly. Mias was willing, very experienced, but also schooled into more positivist approaches. Experimental conditions, the removal of bias, and maximisation of validity, reliability and therefore generalizability were important to him. Initially, I thought that this could be a unique opportunity to do qualitative research in ways that satisfy the criteria for more positivist and quantitative research. But in the process of writing my final research proposal, I no longer felt I could satisfy Mias's ideas about

²³ A Greek translation from Google Translate.

research, and I allowed for contact between us to fade. I did not deliberately ignore him. I simply did not know what to say to him, and in the months approaching September, we barely spoke.

I was set to present my research proposal to the university late in July, and worked very hard in the weeks leading up to 16 June to finalise a research proposal. With the disparate and mainly unavailable work on play, as well as the brand new ideas I was experimenting with on methodology, it took much longer than I expected. The recipes weren't so well-developed. The university had templates and examples for quantitative research, but a study on autoethnography defied all these templates and ideas. I raced with all the work up until 16 June, when Anne-Marie and I got onto a plane and flew to Germany for 4 weeks, in part for business, and in part for leisure. I remember reading through a draft research proposal on the plane on our way to Minchin and emailing it to Johann from the airport. It was far from complete, still requiring a whole section on methodology, but the literature review was complete.

The weeks between 16 June and the end of July disappeared into a variety of work, play, research and nothingness. I contacted an old friend who, at the time, was also doing an autoethnographic study through a different university. I learned valuable lessons from her and, more importantly got an introduction to the work of Prof. Willem Schurink, her study leader and a stalwart supporter of qualitative research. During the trip to Germany, I facilitated two memorable workshops together with a colleague, and contrary to our prior expectation, our German colleagues had a meaningful time with the quirky and playful methods we brought to the work. We laughed and joked and shared and laughed. I took a few vuvuzelas (it was during the Soccer World Cup) and we had raffles and competitions. And what we experienced there seemed to vindicate the topic.

Anne-Marie and I also travelled to Berlin and Prague. This was the second time we travelled overseas together, the first being a road-trip through Spain, France and Italy in 2008. But this time around, the mood of the travelling was a little dampened. The research preoccupied me and I stressed out about the dissertation, which I desperately wanted to submit 19 Nov 2010. Consequently, I was working hard on getting the research proposal out by 18 August. This was already overdue and threatened the submission date of less than 3 months away. To make up for lost time,

I made sure that I started with the data gathering, and also bolstered the research proposal into something that was already worthy of representing the first few chapters of the dissertation. I did this, not only to impress upon the panel that a great deal of work had already been done, but also because both the topic of play and the methodology of autoethnography felt like a labyrinth that I had to navigate. In my zeal, I got more lost than found in the topics of play and autoethnography, and instead of submitting the proposal in August, decided to consult with Prof. Willem Schurink. My friend was kind enough to introduce us, and I met him on 1 Sept. Prof. Johann always had spectacular ideas about play and work, and how to link my work circumstances to the topic, but I felt that I needed hands-on advice on autoethnography, and Prof. Willem seemed like the right person for that. This interaction was invaluable, and I walked away with a list of practical ideas about participant-observation, research journals, postmodern principles and a list of authors to consult. The new submission for the research proposal was set at 15 September, and the idea of only submitting the research in 2011 was already dawning on me, accompanied by that sinking feeling at the end of 2010. For the moment, I was undeterred. I had momentum, I felt like I had sufficient data, and I had Prof Johann's backing.

When I look back at the months between April and September 2011, I can't believe how quickly they went by. Even more alarming was the amount of time that went into data gathering, literature, consultations and research proposals. And just to freak out completely, the only thing I had to show for it was a 50 page document. Despite that, I also now look back at this time as a time of orientation. Back on a mountain, if you want to figure out where you are going, you need to match your map with the geographic points around you. You grab the map with North up, take your compass and turn to face that direction, then you consult waypoints and markers on the map and match them to the geography that you see around you. Once you have done that, you know where you are, and your chances to navigate effectively over the next hill or valley are amplified. I look back at the days of meeting with Prof. Johann, Dr. Mias, Rhonel as well as Prof Willem Schurink, as a time of orientation. The markers of literature, previous autoethnographic studies and the conceptual direction from Prof. Johann and methodological guidelines from Prof. Willem pointed out the

way. I was just concerned. I was still on the foothills of the mountain, and the map was pointing to a long way to the summit.

Two things that does manage to get me going were, firstly, a firm (immovable) deadline, and secondly, an audience. With the research proposal meeting set on 15 September, my name on the list, and an 80% complete research proposal, I thrived. For a week or so in September, I pulled together all the work I had done and worked it into a presentation format that I felt was reflective of the topic and the methodology. Moving away from tried and tested methods has been a golden thread through the research thus far, so I prepared my presentation on a playful and creative presentation application called Prezi.com. It took me a few hours to master the basics, and a one late evening to summarise the key points into a presentable canvas. There is that scary moment, when you realize that a few months of hard work can all be summarized in a 15 minute talk. It can be agonizing, and can make all the effort feel worthless. But then again, it is the trained athlete that puts in hours, days and weeks into preparing for the mountain. In all the hikes that I have done, it is the ones I do when I am prepared, fit, and correctly orientated that are the most satisfying. Somewhere buried deeply, I still held that view of the research thus far.

The presentation was successful. The panel was impressed, I scored a 75% average for the subject it represented and with that, had my backpack on and was on my way.

1.4. Stopping and smelling the middle-berg flowers

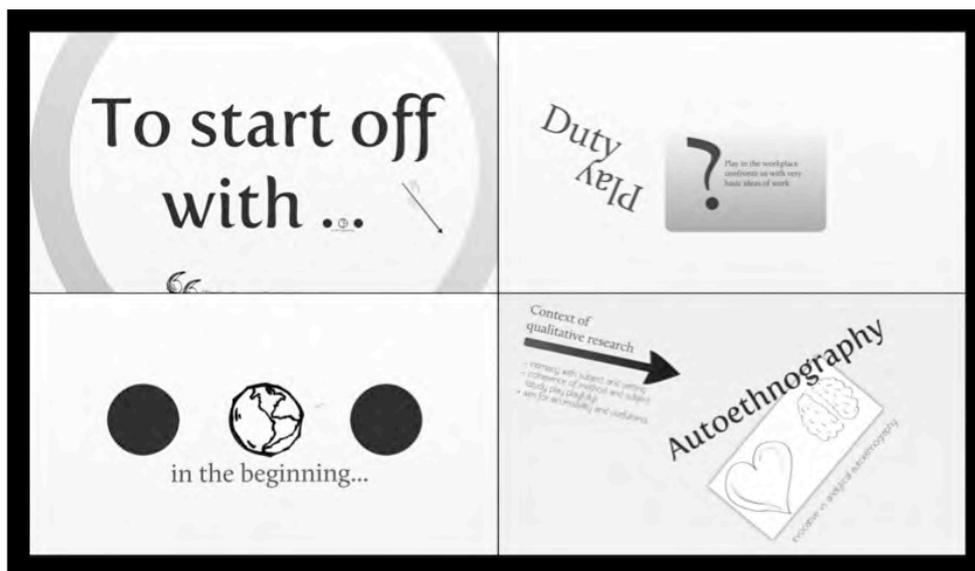
But the research proposal process gave me new momentum and highlighted a few different challenges. Aside from an enthused approval, there were three other decisions. Firstly, my dissertation would be changed from a few research articles to a fully-fledged dissertation, allowing me more space to motivate and clarify what was both an unusual topic as well as a highly contested methodology. Secondly, the panel considered bringing on board another study leader that could help with research methodology. Qualitative research was not a strength in the faculty, and autoethnography was not something anyone felt comfortable with. Even though this proved to make life a little difficult, I was at a point where I welcomed any help I could get. The panel asked me if I knew of anyone that could help, and I offered that

Prof. Willem was both informed about the study and was an acclaimed methodologist in qualitative research. A few weeks later, after asking him about his willingness, that panel informed me that Prof. Willem was indeed on board.

The third decision was that the research deadline was extended into 2011, possibly April if I could make it. This was exactly what I wanted to do. Within a week or so, these decisions were administered, I was informed that Prof. Willem was appointed as a secondary study leader and the research was registered as a dissertation titled “An autoethnographic exploration of play at work.” The title I proposed was “Too busy not to play,” but the panel felt that it didn’t describe the study sufficiently. I wanted to get on with it, so jumping through a few hoops didn’t bother me too much. This was a small victory for traditional scientific writing, and I resolved to find ways through chapter titles to bring more creative and evocative language to the text.

The part of the hike that I normally enjoy the most is the middle-berg area. There are some tough stretches, but it consists of mainly manageable walks and great views. The physical exertion does not dominate other senses yet, and the smells and colours of flowers and hills are more vibrant. The progress seems constant and the momentum is exhilarating.

Illustration 4. Screenshots from research proposal on Prezi.com



Data gathering

Between April and September 2010, between all those meetings and consultations, I spent a large amount of time on literature, writing and rewriting my research proposal, reading some more, glancing over the previous work I had written and rewriting some of that, and so forth. I also, despite not having had my research proposal accepted, started gathering the necessary data. With an autoethnographic methodology, this felt relatively easy. I had identified 31 different play events that formed part of the development of the team of facilitators that I was part of, including some events that pertained to our larger department. In all of these, play and play-based methods had a significant role. Some were formal development sessions and others were more informal social gatherings. I had photos for many of them as well as diary notes (in some instances), and of course, memories. I pulled together all the material in a note-taking application that was securely backed up and proceeded with memory recall (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004). I also scheduled a few meetings with colleagues to assist me in thinking through those memorable events, the impact they had on us individually, and also the effect they had on our team. The information related to my direct work team formed the primary information I wanted to consider in the dissertation. I had my own lived experience I could reflexively incorporate, and it included experiences as participant as well as facilitator. Another important thing was that it also represented a fairly secure bet from an ethical perspective. I was already a full member of the research setting and matters of entree were taken care of. Given a strong relational bank account with my teammates, I anticipated navigating through any ethical consent and anonymity issues with relative ease.

Aside from these 31 events, there were also 7 events that I facilitated with other teams, either alone or in co-facilitation with one of my teammates. These sessions offered useful perspectives and often corroborated some of the personal experiences I have had. The ethical position in this was different, however. None of those sessions were done with the explicit consent of the people to participate in research. They weren't organized in that way, and it wasn't the intention. The last thing you need when facilitating a group of people is for them to feel like you are experimenting on them. Had the whole research topic been approached differently, perhaps as action-research, different possibilities might have applied. But this was autoethnography, and I abided by the customs and ethical boundaries it implied. I decided to only use

these sessions as a reflection of my own experience as a facilitator. As a consequence, despite having facilitated a number of interesting and possibly relevant sessions, the experience of these participants were outside of my scope.

Playing with the idea of a focus group

Given the focus described above, I agreed with my study leaders as well as with my team to conduct a practical, playful, focus group where we would use play to reflect on play. To give the day greater legitimacy, I designed it to incorporate three ideas. Firstly, we could use the day as an opportunity to learn about different play-based methods and everyone was invited to bring some play to the workshop. Secondly, we framed the day as a team bonding experience whereby we could reflect on our team journey over the past few years. And thirdly, the day would be recorded and captured to form the basis of a research project. We called the day “purposeful play,” and the phrase caught on well and has since become a stock phrase among my teammates.

With the generous help of Hayley Kodesh, we designed a day that included a variety of methods, icebreakers, creative-arts play, games, and running around. We also spiced up the look and feel and brought in bean bags and music from childhood TV programs such as Brakanjan and Gummy Bears. I ordered a variety of kiddies meals from Spur for lunch and we had streamers, balloons and candy floss. This happened on 18 October 2010, a couple of weeks after the research proposal was accepted. It was a great way to study play actively, engaging, and playfully.

Throughout the day, I made participant-observation notes about what I was seeing, but also what I experienced. The whole day was recorded in video and we encouraged people to walk around and take pictures. Certain aspects of that day, despite being daring and fun, remains contained in the memory of that day, only proven by the material I have. This also applies to the children’s music, animal cookies and candy floss. But all in all, the day was both meaningful and fun, and some of the things we did throughout that day have now become a trademark part of sessions that we facilitate.

This process was significant in many ways. It taught me about participant-observation, self-observation and how to ethically navigate informed consent when

video and audio material are being used. The content of the day itself was fun, rejuvenating and an experience of community. Much of what was shared on this day ended up on a team comic strip a couple of months later. One notable example is about me and my “twinkling toes.” For the first time, my team realised that I wiggle my toes when I speak. Heck, I realised it for the first time. There is much to learn about each other when we kick off our shoes. On a mountainside, this, of course, also exposes those with smelly feet. But these feet are feet that covered some ground, so it is easy to excuse them. As 2010 raced to a close, it felt like I covered some good ground. I thought I had reached the pass that extends to the summit, and I decided to put up camp for a while; I would attempt the summit after coming back in the new year.

1.5. Getting stuck on the mountain side

Most of the hikes I have done have been with experienced friends and along known paths. Camping at the foot of the ascent is therefore an unnecessary waste of time. But if the hike is unknown, the path unexplored, it is a different matter altogether. Whether this is done on the mountain while acclimatizing, or through the comforts of technology, GPS and maps studied long in advance, it takes careful planning. You have to consider all the routes, look at the possible hazards, and draw up a plan. More than anything, you then need to commit to a path and stick it out. I nevertheless spent the remainder of 2010 and into January 2011, going over my notes, going through those photos, listening to the audio recordings and looking at the video material of the purposeful play day. And somewhere in this process, I got stuck on the mountainside.

Disruptions and interludes of play

For the months of January to March, not a word of productive text came from my pen. I drew pictures on scrap paper which I would later throw away. I made checklists and pulled up calendars. I also got distracted, played computer games to get rid of the building anxiety, and invested myself in work. To add to this, I considered changing careers. What is not reflected in the above pages, is that despite my love for play, play-based methods and workshop facilitation, the organisational renewal initiative we were part of was a sinking ship. It started off as a project a few years ago and has, in the meantime, despite the success on the ground, lost traction

and senior sponsorship. The leadership experienced some turnover and no effort was made to appoint credible and experienced leaders. Positions started to fall away and more and more people were leaving the department. This was not at all new; the situation has been evident since the close of 2009. Most of us were just holding out in hope of some sanity and logic at some point in future. We held on because of our love for the work and our loyalty to each other. But as 2010 drew close, and with the possible advent of the last stretch on the dissertation, it was time for me to go. Despite knowing this, I only actively got involved after being contacted by a large Management Consulting Firm.

I mention this for a few reasons. During that crucial time, it contributed significantly to my workload, optimism, self-discovery and eventually a massive disappointment from which I had to pick myself up. In one of the crucial interviews, I was asked to prepare and present a case study on delivering a change management program to a large organisation. And without flinching, I decided to build the whole case study around play. I have never explicitly thought about myself as a creative person - I don't really do art. But I have always thought about myself as a playful person. I borrowed a friend's bicycle for the interview and rode it into the interview room before asking the panel to extract meaningful metaphors from the bicycle. I then built those metaphors dynamically into my presentation, which was done on Prezi.Com and reflected the shape of a bicycle. I loved it. And the panel loved it.

"This is the Jacques I got to know," my friend said to me that morning when I picked up the bike. Somehow, my closest friends knew what I had forgotten. That play was part of me. If only I could remember this in relation to the dissertation, I thought.

I continued this process and during the 5th interview, late in March, I met the CEO. This interview was abrupt, to the point. Despite getting approval from all the interviews thus far, my candidacy was rejected because of a conflict of interest. "Your organisation is one of our biggest clients, and we can't risk damaging that relationship."

Too busy playing and working

While trying to balance work, research, life and career, the disruptions and side-plays of 2011 lead me through another time-warp. If you only have four months to do something, and three months go by in a blink, that is a massive reason for concern. While I took two separate weeks of study leave in February and March respectively, I felt disrupted, distracted and unproductive as far as studies are concerned. I attempted to write the first chapters of the dissertation. I had the research proposal to work from, but progress was slow. I completely underestimated the effort it eventually took to convert a research proposal into three chapters. I failed, and had a revisit of the feelings I had at the end of 2009. Whereas normally, I am an upbeat, energized, and productive kind of guy, this marked a time of stagnation, despair, and feelings of being overwhelmed. My coping strategies included withdrawal into a corner, not contacting anyone about my dissertation, investing myself in work, and engaging in distracting activities to keep my life and marriage from experiencing the same thing. The April deadline came and went, accompanied by a few rationalisations.

It didn't stop there. I went on two more overseas assignments between mid-May and early July in which I spent a total of 6 weeks outside of the country, two of them on a holiday in Scotland with Anne-Marie. Both the trips were enjoyable and productive from a work perspective. Despite the waning mandate of our department, as individuals, we were still in high demand. This was comforting. But it was a comfort that was restricted to certain compartments of my life. There was one compartment that was messy and smelly, and I avoided it at all cost. It is as if I lived in two separate worlds in that time. In one world, life continued and was filled with the Hamburg harbour, the Scottish highlands, Khalid dancing, whisky and quality time with my wife. Spending time with her was important. We had to participate in a story that left both of us with a sense of satisfaction, and my research couldn't do that.

On numerous occasions over the preceding year, my wife would walk up to me while I was sitting at my desk, sit down on my lap, rub my back, kiss my forehead, and say she loved me before going to bed. I had this whole world of research I was living in, and nothing was coming out of it. I started feeling lonely. I didn't know how to involve her. Aside from making me coffee and whispering words of

encouragement and affirmation, there was little she could do, and even less that I allowed her to do. During those times, she would run the household, do the budgets, and even initiate date-nights and sex. I had become a passenger in my life, to some extent. And I made a promise to her that I would deal with the burden, the shackles that studies had become. Our trip to the UK was an important token of saying to her that we could still have a life.

When I look back at this, I am alarmed at my behaviour. It's not that I didn't spend time on studies. I just didn't have anything to show for it. It felt to me like my mandate from my study leaders was clear enough. I had to analyse that data, write an autoethnographic representation of play at work, and write a reflexive account about the process. And finally, I had to write the recommendations and conclusions. A breeze! It surely sounded like that. But until I had something to show them, I simply did not have the courage to approach either of my two study leaders. I can look back at those months and honestly say that I was incredibly busy. The one thing I desperately needed to do was attempting a summit. Yet, my hands found a kind of gravity attached to the chores in and around the campsite that was too strong to break free from. I was either too busy to play around to work, or too busy with fake-work in order to play into my higher vocations. I was stuck on a mountainside.

1.6. Picking myself up by the bootstraps

There comes a time when our comfort zones become uncomfortable, when remaining in the campsite is more unbearable than hitting the trail. I came back from Scotland with that discomfort. It was in the third week of July and I had a back-to-back work schedule that cancelled me for the next three weeks. Weekends didn't feel useful for studies, as I felt that it was a chasm that can't be crossed in two jumps. I needed a few long stretches. This was the one big change I made in comparison to my work methods in past, and whether or not this was just a mental block, it worked.

I resolved to clear my diary for studies and subsequently put in leave for two weeks in August, two weeks in September, and two weeks in October, exclusively for this purpose. I had three half-written chapters for my thesis that still existed in the form of a blown-up research proposal. I also had three unwritten chapters, barely existing even in the form of a draft layout. I had pages of notes, photos, artefacts and

analysis, all lying dormant. But the short break from work, connection with my wife, and a looming deadline created a brooding storm that confirmed the discomfort of the campsite. The conviction to do what it takes to get the dissertation behind me in a way that drew from my initial inspiration was rekindled. The photo, the piece of paper at the end, was not all that mattered. But by God, I was going to get that photo! And I wanted to regain what I was busy losing.

Two of the groups I worked with in those last few weeks in July 2011 were a blessing in disguise. They ended up being very useful play experiences, and the participants from those workshops offered a very encouraging affirmation for the role of play in our workshops. I rounded off the workshops and captured all the documentation neatly; I even produced a five minute video clip of a play-based strategy session for the team involved. It was a multi-media representation of the workshop outcomes, and not only reminded them of the decisions, but also of the fun time they had.

And then, I got up. But this time round, it was different. Anne-Marie and I spoke a lot during the time in the UK about how she could support me and become part of that minute space into which so much of my mental effort got condensed. One of the things she did was to create a colourful, visual wall with pictures of friends and family. She would update the posters with messages of encouragement and inspiration from time to time. We also agreed to make sure we keep doing a few things together. For example, exercising together and watching a few of the TV series that we love so much remained part of the schedule. I pulled up a fancy planning schedule, created countdown cards for each day on which I had to mark a smiley or sad face. I also gave myself stars for good performance or wrote down a come-back plan if things went badly on any given day. I also started the mornings with a quick creative-arts exercise where I drew or made some sort of representation of how I felt, or what I was thinking. I was no longer in my little corner, alone. And I no longer tried to muster up the sheer willpower to climb the mountain out in one stretch. No, I stood up, put the backpack on, and started singing as I walked towards the first hill. The singing only stopped occasionally when I took a sip of water, or took a bit of biltong. I felt focused, clear, and psychologically prepped for a couple of weeks of hard work.

Pulling myself up by my bootstraps came much easier than I anticipated. There is something important about activating ourselves in directions we have been avoiding, and the play techniques listed above helped me to this. But, to my disappointment, such activation, and even walking for a couple of hours a day, proved insufficient for me to reach some of the goals I had set. This mountain was layered, and when I got over the first hill, there was another one stretching out above it that was previously hidden.

By the end of August, instead of being done with the dissertation, I had only completed my first three chapters to a sufficient level of detail. I expanded on some of the sections and converted what was a research proposal into the intro, the methodology and the literature chapters, together with an outline of the other chapters. I had 80 pages of, what I hoped, was well-written and sufficient. Most of it I enjoyed writing. It was in itself a breakthrough. It also offered me an 80 page entrance ticket to re-engage my study leaders, whom I had neglected for nearly 10 months. Early in September, I emailed both Prof. Johann and Prof. Willem those first three chapters, accompanied by apologies, self-deprecation and rationalisations about overseas trips and work. I then made two dreaded phone calls I had been avoiding for months. I managed to secure a meeting with Prof. Johann the following week, and we had to squeeze in a 45 minute conversation in between other meetings that he already had booked. Prof. Johann is a busy man, and I would rather take the opportunity while allowing for more interaction to proceed over the phone or via email if required. The agenda from my side was to firstly recap the work I had done thus far together with a detailed explanation of the data I had, the analysis and what I intended for Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Wrong way up

Prof. Johann and I met on Tuesday 13 September. It is always good to see him and he was, as always, encouraging, enthusiastic and supportive. I covered most of the important points I wanted to make and Prof. Johann offered useful perspectives and reflections on the material. Sometimes, when he speaks, I just want to zip out a notebook and start writing. Prof. Johann also felt comfortable with the general direction for the last three chapters and we agreed on the timelines that would be important for us to submit on time.

But then, he hit me with a curveball. He suggested that I design a qualitative questionnaire and administer it to a number of my clients as a kind of triangulation. I already had good interview material with one of my colleagues and also had video material of the purposeful play focus group from Oct 2010. Prof. Johann suggested that I corroborate this with at least 10 to 15 interviews, thematically analysed. I reluctantly agreed, and quietly wondered how I could fit this into the timeframes. Given my tendencies for procrastination, perfectionism and over-analysis, this was a challenge.

I wondered afterwards why I didn't resist this more strongly. There is the obvious point that study leaders are there for a reason. Prof. Johann's motivation was pretty clear; he felt that more supportive evidence would, in the end, help me with the legitimacy and acceptability of the work. He struck a chord of deep anxieties and uncertainties that, in part, have been major reasons for my delays and the many hours of brooding over data. The problem I had was that, despite the numerous references to interviews in autoethnographic work, not one of the examples I studied as guidelines included this approach. There was the study of Van Loggerenberg (2010) in which she interviewed one other person, similar to what I had done with my lengthy conversations with Hayley. Then there was the Huss study (2008), which was also focused on multiple interviews of one business leader. The work of Avraamides (2007) was pure autoethnography without any other interviews. Even the highly acclaimed works of Ellis (1995) were often focused on one or two people. I'm not saying it doesn't exist, but both the local as well as international autoethnographies I have focused on had a different approach. Despite this, I also liked the idea of having back-up data and the idea occurred to me of writing an autoethnographic creative non-fiction, where I build these interviews into a workshop. This felt like an altogether different mountain. In essence, Prof. Johann was suggesting that I was about to climb up the wrong pass.

I drafted an interview guideline on the same day, sent it to Johann and proceeded to schedule 12 interviews over the following three weeks. I also contacted Prof. Willem a week before and managed to set up a telephone conversation with him over the upcoming weekend. The initial contact with Prof. Willem was awkward. He had apparently tried to contact me in March via email and heard nothing from me in over

five months. I later dug up the email he sent me, after he forwarded the initial correspondence as proof. I'm not sure it would have made a difference if I had seen it; back in March, I still had nothing to show, and since the student should be doing the heavy lifting, pitching up empty-handed was just never an option for me, despite how lost I felt.

Unfortunately, Prof. Willem was travelling to Cape Town to give lectures, and the best we could do was a quick telephone conversation which he took while sitting in his hotel room. It was Sunday 18 September and it was only the third time I had spoken to him, the first time being when we met and then again when he agreed to be a secondary study leader. Aside from the missed emails and logistical SMSs, this was our third interaction. I was thankful for his sacrifice of allowing a telephone conversation on a Sunday while he was in Cape Town. Our hour-long conversation was fruitful and productive. I explained the change in plans with regards to the interviews and asked him for some methodology pointers. He expressed some concern about the sheer volume of data I was proposing and warned that it would be a challenge I should negotiate in my final writing. He also suggested that we include one or two of those interview transcriptions as supporting documentation. I got some valuable input regarding the remainder of the chapters and, while expressing reservations about his workload and availability, said we should nevertheless try to make it work.

Phew! Neither of my study leaders had rejected me! I wasn't completely alone on this mountain, and although I had to slightly circumvent it to find another way up, there is huge relief in doing this with the blessing and backing of experts. The challenge was however that the mountain was not getting smaller, and walking around in search of another way up put the timelines under further pressure. I was a pressure kind of guy, and quietly resolved to make it work. I was optimistic. And there was another point; the part that most scared me I could avoid for a while longer. The final writing of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 came to a complete standstill. Perhaps part of the reason why I was so agreeable to the interviews was for this very reason. Interviews were easy; what terrified me was to write.

1.7. The path of semi-structured interviews

The alternative pathway up the mountain turned out to be 11 semi-structured interviews with interviewees that mostly came from the groups that I worked with in those last few weeks in July. There were also a few of my colleagues and co-facilitators on the list. It turned out to be both harder and easier than I anticipated. Getting access to people's diaries is hard. We have to negotiate, appeal to them for support, reschedule as other things gets prioritised as more important. Most of these interviews were done under some time pressure, and although interviewees gave me between 60 and 90 minutes, two of the interviews had to be cut down to about 40 minutes. All of the interviews were nevertheless quite insightful and satisfying. There is an interesting difficulty with interviewing in that the people I interviewed were doing me a favour. They were voluntarily offering their time for me to do research. In retrospect, it is obvious that I selected participants that were accessible, and with whom I had a good degree of rapport. Despite this obvious bias, I tried to select a variety of participants in the form of gender, race, age, as well as disposition to the play in our workshops.

Interactive and conversational interviewing

Another challenge was that the interviews themselves required a disciplined focus, and I constantly tried to keep an awareness of the co-creative dynamics that were unfolding in each interview. During this time, I read some material related to interview research and realised how often, in psychology, research is promoted as being sterile and clinical, in search of those positivistic and generalisable universals. Much of the debate and the movement towards approaches that are more interpretivist and constructionist in nature are adequately argued by Fontana and Frey (2000). Just for a quick look at the debate, Fontana and Frey maintain the following:

As many have argued convincingly (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Fontana, 2002; Hertz, 1997b; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Scheurich, 1995), interviewing is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers. Two (or more) people are involved in this process, and their exchanges lead to a collaborative effort called *the interview* (p. 696).

A more "empathetic interview" is therefore required, one where researchers recognise the political nature of interviews as well as their role own role in creating knowledge.

In line with suggestions from Ellis (2004) and Chang (2008), I opted for a semi-structured interview that was strongly guided by questions, but that allowed itself to borrow from the depth and quality that comes from more conversational styles (see Annexure C). Ellis writes about dyadic interviewing, where the researcher or interviewer's story is treated as equally important as that of the interviewee. One of the characters in Ellis' methodological novel observes the following:

The researcher's story is important in its own right, not as a tactic. The stories play off each other. You learn more by interacting with each other where all participants have time to add to or change their stories than in a one-shot deal where the interviewer simply gets the first and, in many cases, the most superficial story. I've interviewed several women now, and I'm finding my story being influenced by the stories I hear and I think their stories are being affected by the one I tell as well (p. 121).

In interactive interviewing, we therefore see a trend of accepting that we do influence each other's realities, that indeed, reality is co-created. This aligns strongly with the principles of this dissertation and allows for deeper access of our interactive dynamics, as well as a reflection of more emotional content. While writing this, I think that in some instances, I succeeded in doing so, but in others, the normative approaches in interviewing have been an obstacle to me.

Reflections on interview structure and process

I began by framing the study and, in particular, clarifying what is meant by play and play-based methods. In as much as this was an important step in explaining the study, I also recognised that it was an opportunity for me to legitimise the study. Normally, when I say that I study play, people have a mixture of responses that includes confusion and excitement. Irrespective of the response, it always requires clarification. Some think it is about play therapy, some think it is about playing Solitaire or wasting time on Facebook when no one is watching. So the framing was important.

In terms of interview structure, the framing, together with the informed consent and admin, was followed by an exploration of attitudes to work, play, and play at work. I introduced some playful questions and brainstorming to trigger more spontaneous free associations and then zoomed in in play and play-based methods in workshop contexts by exploring both the methods as well as people's experience. This was

done by first asking the interviewees to recall what happened in the workshops and what stood out for them. I then, somewhat hesitantly, “helped” recall some of the stuff we did by running through some of the activities and experiences. I tried to be clinical about this, but found that their smiles and responses triggered phrases like “that was so interesting” or “we had such a laugh” slip out of my mouth. I was nevertheless satisfied in it being a co-created memory, and not me telling the interviewee what happened and how they should feel about it. It was, nevertheless, a fine line.

In addition to exploring the more objective “stuff that happened” and recalling some of that together, I then asked interviewees about the experiences that stood out, that worked well, or that perhaps didn’t work well. I also risked a more guided approach by asking the interviewees about their specific views in relation to the concept of the inner child and also tactile, sensory and bodily experiences in play. These were themes that emerged from the previous fieldwork I had done and, while realising that people don’t normally think about their experiences in those conceptual frameworks, I still wanted to examine some of their opinions and ideas about it and found that their views and opinions were forthcoming.

Going with the appreciation

I recorded the interviews with a digital audio recorder and also made notes about my reflections on important points that were raised. The process undoubtedly confronted me with my motives and basis. Was I purely interviewing people with a confirmation bias of looking for the info that substantiated my preconceived ideas? Or was I really looking for robust conversation about play, play-based methods, and our varied experiences of it? Even though I wanted to aim for the latter, this proved tricky. I had a strong rapport with all the interviewees and they were trying to help. Also, our workshops were impactful, novel, and left participants with an enriched experience in general. I tried to compensate for this by starting every introduction with the invitation to feel free to not be too helpful. I invited them to be honest and to dissent, if they wanted to. I inquired about what worked and really had to dig for what did not work. I also introduced some indirect questions as a kind of truth serum. For example, I asked them how they would describe a good workshop or team session; I also asked them to critically reflect on how they would brief facilitators in

future in preparation for team sessions. Despite this, the feedback I got was overwhelmingly positive. People loved playing, and the way we facilitated it in workshops contributed to an experience of personal and team enrichment. Given this, I resorted to allowing the process to be more appreciative (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) and resolved to loosen up on my anxieties about getting a balanced view. Rather, I honed in on understanding what contributed to the success of play and what the experienced benefits were.

Interview analysis

So doing the interviews, both from a logistical point of view, as well as from a rigour point of view, proved tricky. But it remained an interactive and hence, energising experience. I enjoyed the conversations and there were truly meaningful moments of shared collaboration. The part that was truly difficult was the analysis. I casually listened to a couple of the interviews for a second time, mostly while driving in order to make use of the time, and then decided to focus more on the content of the interviews than the process. After all, the interviews were meant to shed additional light on the participant-observation, self-observation and focus group data that I already had. I was drowning in data, and wanted to simplify things. This arguably sacrifices the more in depth discourse analysis and other issues in postmodern research of voice, authority, and interactive dynamics.

And then, it started. There had now been some distance since the interviews were conducted, I hoped, and after an initial high-level scan of the notes I captured about the interview, I went through each one, moment by moment, analysing the content, and writing down phrases and concepts against a table with indexed time-frames in order to easily refer back to those points. Ideas of codification from content analysis and grounded theory influenced the process, and I ended with a complicated spreadsheet, a large spider diagram, and probably a dozen A4 pages with loose notes. I then used the information to standardise some of the phrases and themes in order to see what emerged across the various interviews. I also created a column of “unique contributions” for each participant to reflect any idiosyncrasies. Some working documents of this can be seen in Annexure D. More detail regarding this analysis is contained in Section 2 of this chapter, in which I combined the interview data with the other data in a thematic analysis. This analysis of Section 2 also contains a strong

element of comparison to standing literature and theory, in accordance with Chang's (2008) suggestions and Anderson's (2006) analytical autoethnography.

Some insights along the way

Some of the insights from this interview process either did not find their way into the thematic analysis of Section 2, or are a little too deeply buried. A few of these are therefore worth mentioning.

Wanting to break free. Firstly, most of the interviewees expressed a very strong calling of orientation to work. Secondly, quite a number of people expressed a discontent with the interrupted nature of work, the loss of agency and the feelings of disempowerment. That is to say that, while we love our jobs, we don't feel like we have enough say about how we do them. The result is that the interrupted in-betweens become the norm and replace the ideal with the real. I wondered how play's ability to tap our intrinsic motivation, and to encourage freedom, volunteerism and spontaneity perhaps promotes agency. Perhaps the expressions of play represent an attempt to recover the intrinsically satisfying and freely chosen aspects that we find lacking. Perhaps what we lack is play, but expressed completely differently.

A rose by another name. Another important observation is that quite a few people had never deliberately thought about play at work, until I arrived and made play explicit, both in the workshops as well as in the normal organisational life. The experience of play is universal but to call it by its name is anathema. If I flash back to my initial introductions to the topic, I also clearly recall how fresh it felt. Creativity, experiential learning, aesthetics, training games, and even play therapy – these I have seen. But simply play? This was different. It is as if we, in the contexts of our organisations, love the smell of roses, but we have to call them something like “aromatic productivity enhancers.” Hence, we all have roses in our offices, but we forgot what they are called. Strange. Perhaps a rose by another name smells just as sweet. Or perhaps, recovering the original name will dispose of our cultural biases and assumptions that have played a part in leading us to a widely shared experience of play deprivation.

On pain and gain (or perhaps playing and gain). Another observation I wish to highlight from the interviews has to do with how people grouped together play with

benefit, intrinsically. Initially, I deliberately asked the interviewees to reflect on their experience of play, separate from the benefits of play. Yet, the two were linked. People experienced play as an opportunity to connect with others, or to unwind, or to be themselves. To the interviewees, these experiences are self-evidently beneficial. It confirms the theoretical definitions of play that highlight play as being an end in itself, intrinsic and autotelic. Play, mostly, is also not painful. Play is associated with light, freedom and good emotions. Therefore, many thought about play as a sort of trick, or a shortcut to get work done or relationships straightened. This intimate link between play and benefit were confirmed by all participants and gives me the confidence to turn that adage of “no pain no gain” on its head. In this adage, the idea is expressed that all gain comes through some sort of pain. We need to pay a heavy price for whatever progress. Yet, play offers a shortcut.

Play is where the heart is. The final observation I want to highlight is the overwhelming sense of play deprivation people expressed. Despite seeing themselves as fulfilled, motivated and passionate, and despite confirming that they loved their jobs, people expressed a nearly universal (in reference to this study) need for more play. In many instances, interviewees could not even answer the question of where they play. Play is something that has been confined to spaces, places and times that are far removed from our adult, organisational realities. And when we taste the bits of play and become aware that this sweet thing we are smelling is indeed play, it feels like a beckoning to come home. Interviewee after interviewee ended our conversation with this realisation: Play takes us home, and if we want to render our workplaces alive, rejuvenated and inspired, we need to bring home to work. We need to play more.

1.8. Writing autoethnographically (hitting the ink-line)

Up to this point in the journey, I have scouted the mountain side, visited and surveyed a few ways up, gathered photos, memorabilia and memories along the way, set up camp, hung out with a variety co-travellers and in the process, I have also wasted numerous hours in getting lost, rabbit-trailing down a specific path and also in getting distracted with all matters aside from the hike. Much of what I did from a research perspective was indeed meaningful, insightful and ensured momentum and progress. But the more difficult part of this journey was to dig deep into myself and

pour myself onto the papers that signify the climb. The summit, in this journey, was always going to be a solitary one. Others would either go up with helicopters, or be available via two-way radio when I make it up. There would be close or remote high-fives and back-pats. But the climb was something I had to do alone. No amount of information on how many people have done this, what paths they took, what lessons they learned, nothing, can substitute for the effort required in that desolate moment of putting one foot in front of the other, of hitting the incline and getting the words onto paper. But I wasn't ready yet. There were a few pieces of equipment still missing, and I needed a few days to gather them.

Choosing an approach

All the data, the interviews, and writing the first few chapters, definitely helped with momentum and a sense of progress. I wasn't feeling completely useless and miserable. But despite this, the real challenge was still to write the stories inherent to this research, to present the data in a soulful way. I had a dozen of ideas. My data lay in front of me like a minefield, or perhaps a maze. The stronger ideas mostly fluctuated between either writing a realistic and chronological story or a creative non-fiction. The first would lead to less raised eyebrows and present something that resembles a realist tale without too many objections. The latter would allow for a more evocative telling, a coherent story that promotes better readability and condense the various themes into a single coherent story. I drew some inspiration from the movements in qualitative research that recognise, firstly, that all writing is always partial and contextual, so trying to get it perfectly right or "true" is a misguided objective. As Ellis (2004) comments:

The 'truth' is that we can never fully capture experience. What we tell is always a story about the past. Gregory Bateson says stories are true in the present though not in the past. Field notes are one selective story about what happened written from a particular point of view at a particular point in time for a particular purpose. But if representation is your goal, it's best to have as many sources and levels of story recorded at different times as possible. Even so, realize that every story is partial and situated. (116)

So any research is partial and selective and researchers are tasked with clarifying this rather than ignoring it or pretending that it's not there. There is an agenda in research, or as many put it, research is political in nature (Denzin, 2006).

Secondly, the blurring of boundaries between science and art, fact and fiction, as promulgated by the postmodernist era, allows for this realisation: just because it is fiction does not mean it is not true. I came to understand this as a boy and teenager who grew up in a church where my favourite minister was a younger preacher who told stories. I remember him fondly as the minister whose sermons I made a point of not missing, despite normally skipping church with some buddies in favour of our secret smoking spots. This minister's impact on my faith journey has been profound and lasting. He would tell stories about people in far off places, animals that could talk, and fables of all kinds. In his stories, I knew there was truth because it gave me ideas, language and symbolism that brought a messy life into perspective. Ever since, the truth hidden inside stories has never been a difficult thing for me to understand. Richardson (2000) writes more academically about this, and in her influential article on "Writing as a means of knowing," she tracks the historic developments of how science and literature became separated, with a clear bias to science in the late 1800s and early 1900s. She then proceeds to how the late 1900s ushered in a reconciliation that brought a variety of creative scientific practises to the fore. "'Creative nonfiction,' 'faction,' 'ethnographic fiction,' the 'nonfiction novel,' and 'true fiction'" were a few of the oxymoronic terms offered for this (p. 926).

As a first step on this incline, I therefore had to come to grips with the subjective, contextual and specific nature of the stories I aimed to tell. I was perhaps climbing a mountain that was prohibited. I was breaking some rules. The first steps of the climb were always going to be accompanied by the voices that asked questions. How can this be science? And if anything, what knowledge does this pursuit offer? Isn't this a big waste of time? Still, Richardson's article was a huge consolation. There is something to claim here, some knowledge to share. We just need to be careful about the claims we make. In her words:

But a postmodernist position does allow us to know "something" without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing. In

some ways, "knowing" is easier, however, because postmodernism recognizes the situational limitations of the knower. (p. 928).

With the feeling that this adequately justifies a creative and engaging approach of representing a specific point of view, warranted by my own lived experience, I opted for the route of creative non-fiction. Creative non-fiction as the approach to writing chapter 4 is also dealt with in the preamble of that chapter. In the following paragraphs, I want to reflect on my own experience in writing this, as well as the decisions I had to make in the process.

Blending fact and fiction - a delicate balance

The core idea behind Chapter 4 was to write the story of a workshop that could bring together the different themes that emerged through the research in an attempt to breathe life into it, make it seem real, and give the reader an opportunity to assess it against the criteria of verisimilitude. I decided to take two of the workshops I recently conducted, and also the two workshops from which where the interviewees came. I scanned the different session plans while keeping the purposeful play focus group information in close proximity. Based on this, I created a few things. I started by creating a typical group and sketched out their function and structure in a way that resembles what I have come to see in my organisation. I identified key roles, a brief history, and also positioned them amidst an organisational restructuring, which has been something that greatly impacted most of the teams I worked with.

Secondly, I identified the characters for the story. The facilitators were easy choices. Since this was an autoethnographic story that was purely based on my experiences in working with play and play-based methods with teams, I was the obvious choice as facilitator. Hayley Kodesh, a close colleague and friend who assisted me a lot in the research and also often provided her perspectives on the issues I was exploring, generously offered to be explicitly involved in the study. She offered to be the second facilitator and agreed that I could use our co-facilitation dynamic as a basis for the story. Despite therefore basing the second facilitator largely on Hayley, I decided to evolve the character to incorporate a few incidents that I experienced with other colleagues and assigned some of that dialogue to Hayley's character. After a conversation with her about this, we both agreed that it would be better to fictionalise her character, even though the character and co-facilitation dynamics still reflected

our relationship. Hence, Helen, the co-facilitator was born. I then looked at a variety of real life people who have been involved in our work, including those that I interviewed, and pulled up a few conceptual maps that contrasted ideas such as extroverted, introverted, open, critical, reflective, reserved, playful, un-playful, etc., and started plotting characters according to my own judgements and experience into these categories. The result was the six characters encountered in chapter 4, and most of these characters were composite characters that leaned on two real life correspondents. Nine of the interviewees were reflected in these characters to a greater or lesser extent, and I relied heavily on the themes from the interviews to construct the text.

A third document I created was a detailed session plan that stretched over two days. I spent quite a bit of time in creating a session plan that I thought would go well in a real life setting, and mapped out the different activities and play-based methods that normally enter our facilitation. The session plan evolved a little as I wrote the story, and I often smiled at how reflective this was of what happens in workshop settings. I nevertheless was careful not to incorporate any methods that have not been an explicit part of my facilitation over the last few years. This indeed felt a bit restrictive in instances when the story sparked novel ideas, but this was a restriction I chose. Overall, I believe that by basing the writing on actual experiences, it made it easy for me to flow into describing some of the reactions I had genuinely experienced. I realised after I had written this chapter that it seldom felt like I had to invent anything. With the team context, characters and session plan drafted out, much of what I wrote felt like it came from actual experiences.

Finally, after creating a detailed session plan, I proceeded to list some of the interactive dynamics in the team. I thought about classic team processes, such as forming, storming, norming and performing. I listed a couple of ideas about team frustrations, job specifications, and then drew relationship-diagrams on a separate piece of paper as a depiction of who likes who, who is friendly with who, and where possible conflicts exist. During the process, I continually reflected back on the real life counter parts and tried to offer a somewhat representative view of the typical dynamics we face in real-life workshops.

Using all of the above, I spent a couple of hours in drawing up a few possible plotlines. One strong contender was a plotline where most of the story was written as a flashback while Helen and I sat and discussed the process. I thought that this would have allowed for more analytical reflection and opportunity to inject some theory into it. The plotline I settled on, developed chronologically as the workshop unfolded, offered a back-flash to the workshop brief, and included a reflection time when Helen and I could discuss the process. One particular difficulty was to decide how to give voice to the actual play experiences I had had, as well as some of the other data that I painstakingly gathered in the process. I decided to allow the conversation between Helen and me to incorporate some of these ideas. And a final difficulty I had to solve, was to illustrate the meta-story, i.e., how I was experimenting with play ideas to approach my own work as a facilitator as well as my work as a researcher. On this, I decided to equip my character with a notebook (or playbook if you will), and to surface actual reflections about the research as well as my struggle in approaching it playfully.

Distractions and crappy first drafts

So, on Friday 14 October, I looked at all the data and preliminary story ideas I set out, and felt mortified. I had no idea how to bring it all together. I had this niggling feeling that I've been walking around the mountain a couple of times, studying it from every possible corner. In all the attempts, I have been trying to guess what it looks like at the top. I guessed, looked at snapshots of previous climbers, and peered into the sun on numerous occasions, but there was a layer of clouds that obscured the view about a hundred metres up. Any view from the foot of the incline was severely handicapped. I had been climbing for an entire year and most of the people that were with me gradually disappeared. It took me too long, and they didn't sign up for an endurance cheerleading parade. Other experienced hikers along the way, such as my study leaders, were also not there. I left them thinking that I had either given up, or that I had got this covered. The only person there with me, was my life-long playmate and faithful cheerleader, Anne-Marie. She would stay at the campsite and await my return while being in constant contact via a two-way radio. Looking at her, realising the load that she had also been carrying over the last few weeks, and looking at the steepness of the incline and the destination unknown, and instead of heading into the mountains, I decided to put it off for two more days. "You can't rush the

creative process,” goes another famous rationalisation. We put up camp, we played in a few water pools, tanned, laughed and ate. I tried to forget, but instead constantly remembered and as a consequence didn't sleep well. My mind drifted to the summit, to the paths I studied, to the risks along the way, and I felt guilty. It was time to get it over and done with. The part of the climb I had been postponing for long would start on the Monday.

It is maddening when you realise that you spend three to four full days in prep, after months of research, and you still have not produced a single line of text. But with all these ideas, I was far better equipped to give it my first try. To make things worse, from the moment I started writing until the point that I had a first draft in place, I'm not sure how much I relied on all of the prep, and how much I simply allowed to intuitively flow onto the pages. I guess that “flowing onto the pages” can only happen once we have put in the prep, but this was largely a subconscious process, and didn't help me with my feelings of inadequacy and guilt. But I nevertheless made this decision over the weekend: Instead of trying to marry all the data with the story, and instead of getting it perfect, I planned to simply write a story that felt realistic, believable, and faithfully reflected a typical workshop scenario from my own skewed and subjective point of view. This was what autoethnography boiled down to.

In thinking back to this, it seems ludicrous how resistant I was to starting the writing process. There is that perfectionist/procrastination tendency that overwhelmed me for quite long. There is the famous analysis paralysis that kept me busy with “doing stuff” that disappeared into an internal world of understanding and knowing, but I failed to reflect externally. I was reminded of Ann Lamot's (2007) work in her teachings on how to write. Says Lamot:

People tend to look at successful writers who are getting their books published and maybe even doing well financially and think that they sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars, feeling great about who they are and how much talent they have and what a great story they have to tell; that they take in a few deep breaths, push back their sleeves, roll their necks a few times to get all the cricks out, and dive in, typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter. But this is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes

elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much (pp. 21-22).

These ideas by Lamot were a great encouragement to me. She continues to say that generally, few good writers know what they are doing until they've done it. In both writing Chapter 4 as well as the backend research story in the current chapter, more than anything, I had to overcome this, I had to "screw it" and "do it;" I had to make a choice to forget about sucking while stepping out in confidence. The process I followed to reach a first draft was similar to that of brainstorming. We suspend the natural rules of consequence (similar to play's quality of outside normal life), we put boundaries to it (again, another play characteristic), we set ourselves a goal (a key principle in game theory) and we "let it rip!" These ideas are akin to experimentation, exploration, imagination and active engagement that we find in all the work on play. I had to forget that this was work and I had to play.

Aside from taking off the breaks of self-doubt and ignoring the voices of inadequacy, there was one more significant thing I did that helped me get through the first draft. I started realising that I was attempting the mountain alone, and wanted to involve people. This burden, or privilege, depending on the point of view, fell on my main cheerleader. I would read snippets of what I was busy writing to Anne-Marie in the evenings. It was an effective way of both reducing the loneliness, and also in listening to the writing from the ear of a reader. When we read or perform our work to an audience, it stimulates more creativity and engagement, perhaps also an element of play and theatre. When we look at the performance from the eyes of a caring and supportive audience, it stimulates different perspectives, brings different aspects into focus and enhances our thinking. These two ideas, in addition to all the prep, spurred me along on the incline. My experience in hiking is similar. Whenever I start off, my muscles complain and berate me for putting them through the discomfort. But in a few minutes, the adrenaline, cortisol, and endorphin in addition to the momentum, make me forget the pain, and I generally find that I can hike much further than I anticipated.

Towards second draft

I find that to try and classify my writing into pure first and second drafts are difficult. It took me some time to learn the skill of writing a first draft before

returning with a more critical orientation for a second one. But the second draft is in fact very iterative. Some sections from the first draft remain good enough, while others receive two or three rewrites; it's difficult to know where the second draft stops. In writing this, the second draft stopped when time ran out. This is probably not the right or ideal way to do this, but reflects some of those knee-jerk tendencies I wrote about earlier. Despite this, the second draft has also, at times, proved to be quite satisfying. On the one hand, it presents me with an opportunity to look at flow, consistency and brevity. But on the other, I also find this a useful opportunity to enhance the creativity of what I was writing. Often, the stronger symbolism and deeper nuances only come through when I read it again, and I took the time to highlight and expand on some of these creative opportunities. This has been joyous. There is of course the other experience, of reading and editing what I wrote, and thinking that it is terrible. It doesn't fit the bigger picture, or it misses the important themes that I wanted to introduce. Some of those concerns I then dealt with, and others I simply decided to live with.

1.9. The way down

Prof. Johann once told me that, in flying helicopters (which is one of his commercial hobbies, aka, play at work), the more difficult part is not to take off, but to land. I believe a similar parallel exists for hiking up a mountain, or doing research. There is the massive push to the summit, the rah-rah celebrations, high-five and back-pats, the photo opportunity and the breath-taking views, and then the anti-climax, the descent. Getting through first and second drafts, getting all the material packaged, the photos inserted, the format in a workable order and inserting those bits and pieces like addendums, acknowledgements and abstract, is all good and well. But it is far from done. In my case, this had to do with the feedback from my study leaders. This feedback was useful, but I got fairly tired at the end. A friend told me that you don't end a dissertation, or a thesis, you abandon it. It took much willpower and perseverance to incorporate those last few changes.

2. Analysis and themes

Whereas section 1 in this chapter deals with how I experienced the hike, I will now move the attention along to describing the views and vistas it allowed for.

Instead of continuing with the back-end story, I will now shift gears towards deeper analysis and interpretation of the research findings, before concluding the narrative in section 3 of this chapter. While acknowledging that this may feel a little like shifting gears without using the clutch, I believe the reader will find this section invaluable in understanding not only the conclusion of this chapter in section 3, but also in contextualising the story from Chapter 4.

In Chapter 1, I clarified that this research inquiry would borrow ideas from the title phrase “play at work.” On the one hand of this phrase, we have the more descriptive and external realities of play-based methods, as applied in workshop contexts. On the other hand, we have the more subjective internal realities of how these methods are experienced. The former deals with what play facilitators do, the latter with the experience of the player. Over the next few paragraphs, I aim to adhere to this basic structure while knitting some of the research material, analysis, interpretation as well as theoretical comparisons into the discussion. By doing so, I aim to balance the stricter forms of evocative autoethnography found in chapter 4 with a stronger element of what Anderson (2006) refers to as analytical autoethnography (see discussion in Chapter 2). In the words of Anderson, “the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves” (p. 387). Anderson concludes that this allows for a “spiralling refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understanding”(p. 388).

2.1. Coming to grips with play-based methods

In Chapter 3, I briefly introduced the four core methods that were sampled to be included in this study, namely icebreakers and games, metaphor and story, creative-arts and physical/body play. What I mean by sampling is simply that these methods became a signature of the workshops we conducted. These methods somehow ended up in our repertoire, probably due to two major contributing factors. Firstly, exposure - these are the methods that we experienced in facilitated and learning contexts. Secondly, there is accessibility. The methods described below can be incorporated with ease. It does require careful planning and a degree of competence, but beyond that, the materials are relatively affordable and many participants in our workshops have had exposure to it somewhere in their lives.

But before we start, let us briefly consider the relationship between method and play. Methods themselves are merely the conduit for play to happen. When we use specific methods, as play facilitators, we do so in hope and anticipation that they will remove certain obstacles to play and instil the necessary enablers thereof. It is therefore important to note that play-based methods, in themselves, are not play. Whether they lead to a complete and authentic experience of play is also not guaranteed.

Nevertheless, to help us understand play in these methods, we need to put some handles on it. Questions such as how to describe play-based methods, play-facilitator motive, player experience as well as the properties of play these methods inherit, are therefore discussed and analysed. I also pay particular attention to specific methods that made their appearance in Chapter 4, and integrate some theoretical positions with the practical experience. To aid play facilitators in finding a language to work with, I offer a preliminary taxonomy to describe these methods.

Coming to grips with methods – a preliminary taxonomy

As a brief reminder, in chapter 3, we considered the four classic categories of games that Roger Caillios (1961) developed. These are contest (agôn), chance (alea), imitation or role-play (mimicry) and dizziness or disorder (ilinx). According to Caillios, these categories are fundamental to play, and they combine themselves in a variety of forms in any given play activity. In addition, Caillios also distinguishes between games and free play. One has clear rules, and the other is more improvisational. T. Brown (2008) offered a different taxonomy for activities that is more descriptive at the surface level. According to Brown, social play, rough and tumble play, spectator play, ritual play, and imaginative play are all basic categories of play. Sutton-Smith (2001), on the other hand, referred to play categories such as mind/subjective play, solitary play, informal social play, vicarious audience play, performance play, festive play (celebrations), contests, playful behaviours as well as risky (adrenaline) play.

In looking closely at the categories and descriptions from these classic authors, I still felt at a loss when trying to describe the play-based methods we use in workshops that often lack categorisation along these terms. Also, no convenient taxonomy exists in literature. It seems that play-based methods, and play for that matter, flow over

different descriptors, and the moment you think you have it, you realise that there's a part to it that you haven't considered.

While gathering and categorising my data, it occurred to me that a taxonomy may be useful in order to denote some of the facilitator motives as well as the ensuing experience it creates for participants. In this, I distinguish between interactive vs. solitary, competitive vs. cooperative, motor-sensory vs. cognitive-mind, participative vs. vicarious and rule-bound vs. improvisational.

Interactive vs. solitary.

Both T. Brown (2008) and Sutton-Smith (2001) include components of this in their categories. In workshop contexts, play normally has a distinct interactive component, but can also be solitary, and in that, rely on imagination as well as subjective play. Interactive play stimulates energy, interpersonal dynamics and gives rise to more expressive and outward play. Solitary play is more reflective and inward bound. For solitary play, we could, for example, encourage players to draw a picture about their own personal journeys, or a road-sign to express a personal preference for how to guide to workshop process. We see then that, in workshop settings, we often incorporate solitary play and turn that into opportunities for interaction.

Competitive vs. cooperative play.

Caillois' (1961) element of contest (agôn) is common in play. Healthy competition is often incited to stimulate more interaction and promote engagement. Almost any activity can be turned into a contest and is sure to bring with it some sort of play benefit. For example, we could brainstorm different ideas to improve a process and ask three teams to compete in coming up with the most ideas. It is however important to note that there are contexts in which competition is not conducive (Donaldson, 1993), and may even discourage people from playing all together. In response to this, we also rely on play-based methods that are more cooperative in nature. For example, everyone in the group contributes to a shared collage, or we play a game that starts off competitive but can only be completed when we learn to cooperate. These categories are also not necessarily mutually exclusive. A play-based method that is cooperative can still include elements of context (e.g., perform against a benchmark, improve against yourself). Cooperative and competitive in this sense imply an overall attitude towards other players. In that sense,

descriptors of competition or cooperation applies more to play that is social and interactive in nature.

Motor-sensory vs. cognitive-mind play.

We find this distinction in Callois' (1961) category of dizziness as well as in T. Brown's (2008) categories of rough and tumble play and imaginative play. Sutton-Smith (2001) also refers to mind/subjective play. The extent to which play-based methods rely on the use of our bodies and senses versus relying more on cognition and ideas is also an important distinction. It is absolutely true that play often involves sensory, bodily as cognitive elements, all at the same time. This descriptor however refers more to the point of departure when we activate play. When people are asked to participate in something tactile, experiential and bodily, it helps to de-emphasise analytical cognitive processes at first. As we get into the experience of play, mindfulness can then assist us in making sense of play. In that sense, it becomes more holistic. In contrast, play-based methods can also stimulate play that is more cognitive and analytical in its very nature, and excludes, for that matter, sensory, tactile and bodily experiences. For example, we can play with ideas, brainstorm, tell a story, incorporate metaphor, and more. Play that is expressly motor-sensory without a cognitive-mind component is less common, but also important. For example, when we dance with a group in a moment of fun, it needn't represent an opportunity to analyse the dance as symbolic of a work-process.

Participative vs. vicarious.

While scholars such as Wood and Attfield (2005) explicitly link play to a participative process, Sutton-Smith (2001) suggests that it can also be a vicarious experience. Play-based methods in our workshop process probably lean more towards a participative nature, but vicarious play can also easily be found. In society at large, cinema, television, theatre and spectator-sports, are all vicarious. The audience participates in the experience by proxy of the players themselves. Participants in workshops often prefer to watch, instead of playing along, and, for them, watching can be just as much fun as playing is to players. Play facilitators need to therefore carefully consider when methods could incorporate vicarious play, and when participation should be encouraged. For example, play-based methods that involve storytelling, role play, and even some games, may all incorporate vicarious

play, whereas drawing and painting activities are more commonly approached as a participative method. While some of the benefits of play will only visit us through active involvement, respecting people's desire to not participate essentially respects the voluntary nature of play. On the other hand, having too many spectators can also be intimidating to players, and a balance is required.

Rule-bound vs. improvisational.

This idea corresponds to Caillios' (1961) observation that play is either ludic (games) or paida (child's play, freedom, improvisational). In rule-bound play, the method prescribes not only basic boundaries such as time and space, but also regulates the play beyond that. Throughout the play-methods in this, as play facilitators, we offer clear and detailed instructions. For example, we ask participants to "answer these three questions," "draw a sign that represents this specific thing," "each person can add one word to the story," and so forth. Rule-bound play offers boundaries that allows for safe participation. Players know what to do and what is expected. Examples of more improvisational play could be saying to a group "dance like no one is watching," and even in improvisational theatre and role-play. In such play, there are still boundaries, but freedom of expression is strongly encouraged and players devise their own conditions for play. Throughout this study, free and improvisational play was encountered in more social and informal play, and deliberately using it as method has thus far been excluded from our practise.

Intrinsic vs. instrumental.

A final category that stood out from the methods found in the study, while feeling descriptive and necessary, also strikes me as rather unusual. Where most scholars define play as non-productive and auto-telic, the play-based methods we utilise range from having very clear purposes and ends to being intrinsic and free from any defined outcome. This presents play-based methods, as practised by play facilitators, albeit with a problematic irony. Functionalising play has been the needed effort to brokerage the benefits of play into our work. All play-based methods should allow for an intrinsic experience for play to be truly present. In chapter four, the one-word-chain story-telling method was the only example in which play was introduced, simply to play, and represents the play events in this study that had this characteristic, of which there was a few. Mostly though, play is given some sort of purpose.

Without attaching play to some sort of purpose, its successful introduction into workplace settings would probably have been impossible. And while therefore clearing the necessary hurdles and allowing *access* to play, we need to be careful not to confuse access with experience.

Play doesn't fit categorisation in a clear-cut way and the ideas from Caillios (1961), Sutton-Smith (2001), and T. Brown (2008) defy copy-paste simplicity. Yet, a greater sensitivity to the differences in method has allowed me to be more conscious about its application and consequently, I have been more open to learn. Huizinga (1949) reflects on play in language, and observes that the very way in which we ascribe language (subjective symbols) to things (objective reality) is derived from play. As a playful and experimental idea, I unreservedly share the above as a work-in-progress. Some handles are better than none. And while I therefore refrain from claiming that this taxonomy is universal and complete, I considered it a possible step in the right direction.

Play-based methods

The most prevalent methods considered during this research process were icebreakers and games, story and metaphor, creative-arts, and physical/body play. All of these methods, by natural selection, evolution, preference, accessibility, or efficacy, have become an integral part of our facilitation. While a more theoretical description of this was offered in Chapter 3, I explore in this section how these methods presented in the research while leaning on the taxonomy to make sense of how these methods are used. In order to facilitate this discussion, I explicitly refer to the play-based methods from Chapter 4, as a representation of the play-based methods that were considered throughout this research process.

Icebreakers and games

Throughout my days as a trainer or facilitator, the most common yet most unconsidered play methods I have encountered has been icebreakers and training games. In most workshops, these methods are often treated as mere side notes to the overall workshop flow and purpose, mainly as a stimulation of fun, boost to participant involvement, and also as attempts to inspire creativity thinking. Although these methods tend to be more in the background of the workshop process, their importance in creating playgrounds, in promoting participative safety, and in creating

an overall play mood, should not be underestimated. In fact, both participants as well as I myself have been surprised at how frequently icebreakers and training games come up as highlights from a workshop.

From Chapter 4, there were a number of applications of this play-based method. Firstly, when the group was asked to introduce themselves by interviewing each other in pairs, the purpose was clearly to encourage involvement and participation in a format that was easily accessible to everyone. This activity was interactive, cooperative, cognitive-minded, and instrumental in terms of aiding in creative introductions. Interestingly, this activity embraced both participative and vicarious components. Another example specifically mentioned was the story circle, during which participants constructed a story by each adding a word to a sentence. The story circle was cooperative, cognitive-minded, and participative. Interestingly, it was also one of the few activities that stood apart by not having an explicit purpose, and not being tied into other workshop components. While we may feel the need for this, feedback from participants confirmed that there is definite room for play as just that, play. The team from Chapter 4 also participated in a warm-up exercise to the physical/body play through a game where participants had to connect certain body parts, e.g., “elbow-to-elbow.” In terms of the taxonomy, this activity was interactive, competitive, motor-sensory, participative and instrumental. On one hand, an activity such as that in itself stimulates a great deal of energy, humour, laughter and physical movement. It also allows people a non-serious exposure to using their bodies before we structure play specifically with a specific purpose, i.e., by asking them to arrange their bodies in a way that represents the team. Although these activities therefore resemble other play-based methods, their express purpose is introductory, facilitative, and enticing. Energisers and games are therefore not apart from creative arts play, physical/body play or metaphor and story in form and shape, but in its intent. We therefore see that these activities are a sort of warm-up, like stretching before exercising. It primes our muscles for play and serves as a sort of wink-wink at participants - a play cue.

Story and metaphor

Similar to icebreakers and games, story and metaphor are ubiquitous not only to our everyday language, but also explicitly so in pedagogical contexts. Although we

might not consider story and metaphor as a form of play, a close look would reveal all the characteristics of symbolism, separation from reality, positive affect,²⁴ and boundaries markers (a long, long time ago in a land far away), as well as a loose connection between means and ends. Metaphor in particular found a prominent umbrella-role in sessions we facilitate. A team session was called “You need my piece” and we built puzzles together. The launch of new strategy processes was called “on the bus,” or “lift-off,” with the teams drawing huge representations of a bus or an airplane that accompanied the overall conversation. We have also used the metaphors of icebergs and, as is demonstrated in Chapter 4, the idea of road-signs to think about navigating the workshop process. This allows for the overall experience to incorporate a look and feel that speaks to the theme and is particularly effective in legitimising play and creativity. Metaphor also aids in creating a rich language that helps us to talk about difficult, nebulous or intangible subjects in meaningful ways.

In a very similar way, story serves a symbolic and metaphorical purpose. By telling a story, whether that includes fables such as the farmer and a treasure, a lion and a monkey, where the gods hid the secret to life, or more famous stories such as “the yellow brick road” (from the Wizard of Oz) or “the red pill or the blue pill” (from the Matrix), we incorporate a metaphorical backbone that anchors a session and permits play. By doing so, we inevitably find that the metaphor and story also create rich symbolism and language that start entering the conversation, create shared meaning and open up possibilities for newer understanding.

In Chapter 4, the fable of the farmer and the treasure was used to symbolise a journey of discovery. We therefore leaned heavily on the treasure metaphor as well as treasure-hunt, or the journey. The bandanas in themselves, although they represented a creative-arts based play, were also metaphorical for identity and expression, just as building a team vehicle with their bodies relied on the metaphor of a car. We therefore find that metaphor easily extends itself into other play-based methods. In order to distinguish between them, it is important to consider what the primary occupation of the player is at the time. In metaphor and story, the primary occupation of the player is that of symbolic linkage, embracing an imaginary reality and finding

²⁴ This might strike us as strange, but if we think about it, even stories that are sad often attract to that sadness a kind of pleasant and desirable quality, as any frequent movie goer or reader of romance novels would attest.

more cognitive/conceptual links to reality. In terms of the taxonomy, metaphor and stories in themselves are more cognitive and improvisational.

The specific metaphors and stories used in Chapter 4 were also more vicarious at first, but then encouraged and invited participation, which is a particularly interesting quality of such play. So although story and metaphor tend to be more solitary, vicarious and reflective, they therefore need to be balanced with more participative and expressive forms of play in order to allow people to engage more fully. Story and metaphor, despite having the power to stimulate vivid images of colour, smell and emotion, work primarily through our minds, our thoughts and our imagination, and can therefore be described as a more cognitive-imaginative.

Picture 4. The messiness and beauty of metaphors



Creative-arts play

Whereas icebreakers, games, metaphor and story were present in nearly all the pedagogical contexts I have been part of for the last ten years, creative-arts play made its debut only in the last few years. This can be largely attributed to the positive influence of a colleague who pioneered such methods in our organisation and has used it effectively in processes ranging from strategy to trauma debriefings (De Klerk, 2007). Whereas these kinds of processes found an easy home in trauma processes due to their close kinship to play-therapy, opening them up to other processes has been a natural and easy evolution. We are therefore seeing paint, crayons, clay and more materials appear in our workshops with great frequency.

As described in Chapter 2, creative-arts play takes its name from art, and also relates closely to art therapy. However, there is a difference in the extent to which the work of art is used as a product with the usual emphasis on aesthetics. In that sense, painting or drawing a picture can be an intimidating task, and this is echoed

throughout the responses from participants in these processes. As a method of play, the components of imagination, creativity, sensory and bodily experience, and positive affect are therefore emphasised. In order to facilitate play through this, it becomes important to de-emphasise quality and aesthetic while promoting experimentation, fun, and engagement.

Picture 5. Creative-arts play in the form of collage, drawing, and painting.



From Chapter 4, we see creative arts make its appearance in the drawing of road-signs, the team journeys, the team possibility collage as well as the individual contribution bandanas. The way creative arts were used starts off as more a reflective practice and extends into an expressive approach. These methods are therefore often solitary, participative, and improvisational (although a grounding metaphor is often given), while more interactive processes are also introduced at times. If there's the need to work together and the opportunity to draw from a common frame of reference, interactive approaches work well. If the purpose is to reflect and allow for personally meaningful expressions to emerge, a solitary approach is often used. Again, most of the examples given in Chapter 4 were applied instrumentally, and play therefore forgoes deeper conversation which leads to bonding, personal insight, and learning. The reason for engaging is often given as instrumental. "We will paint a bandana that represents our contribution." This also helps in overcoming the reservations that are commonly present.

Expressive arts play offers a potent approach towards integrating sensory and cognitive processes. It however encourages us to suspend our judgements and to allow for a more intuitive outcome to emerge. This however remains difficult to many who prefer to approach it in ways that are more cognitive-mindful and even conceptual-analytical.

Physical/body play

Similarly to creative-arts play, physical play is not as common in adult and pedagogical settings as are games, icebreakers, story, or metaphor. It probably depends heavily on culture, and in the Western culture whose values I share, we tend to become more restricted and reserved as we grow into adulthood. It is hard to imagine a 30 or 40 year old man rolling down a hill in continuous somersaults. Yet, there remains an innate desire to express ourselves physically, and sports, exercise and of course sex, often fulfil this need for adult populations. Physical body play in workshops also leans on sports, games and exercise, and depending on the type of workshop, not even sex would be off the table. That being said, I have never been in workshops where that was either opportune or appropriate, and while some facilitators might do their best to hide their disappointment, I can honestly say that I prefer it that way.

We therefore often see physical body play in workshop contexts in the form of games. Games, with an object of winning (or whatever other goal), are often enough to distract players long enough to result in an energetic and sometimes hilarious display of bodily expressions, both awkward and elegant. In our workshops, we have had dances, built physical formations, done obstacle courses, and played games that all incorporated physical body play. In Chapter 4, this was represented as the warm-up activity of “elbow-to-elbow,” which incorporated both physical body play as well as icebreakers, and continued into the construction of a team vehicle. The latter has a resemblance to the use of metaphor and, in a way, has also been a construction of a work of art. The team painted a picture by how they arrange themselves. Even though it therefore attaches itself to other methods, because of its aerobic and gross motor properties, it is useful to distinguish it as a separate play-based method that taps into our kinaesthetic and tactile senses.

Picture 6. Physical/body play in drums, ribbons and African dancing.



This kind of play results in interactive, often competitive, participative, improvisational and instrumental play. There were also moments of cooperation and intrinsic value. Overall, this method will always rely on motor-sensory properties and therefore invites us into a larger world than what we can experience purely through our cognitions.

The above exploration is an adequate representation of the kinds of methods that have become play companions and facilitators in the workshop contexts and pedagogical spaces of this study, and their frequent presence has offered a useful platform for inquiry. As much as methods have the ability to stimulate play, methods can also prevent play. Lack of aesthetics (I don't like this song) and perceived incompetence (I can't sing) can be rather big obstacles to play. The same is true for drawing and dancing, of course. How methods either allow for play or prevent it is an important consideration to play facilitators. We should remember that these methods are tools that aid us, primarily in enhancing play experience. Achieving said outcomes are indirect, open and therefore of secondary importance. By exploring how these methods can be described in terms of the taxonomy provided earlier, we demonstrate how a greater consciousness of the kind of play we are introducing assists us in deliberate and strategic application of methods in given situations. It also forces us to be mindful of process and facilitator intent. The practical wisdom born from this reflection also highlights the important success factors in creating engaging, acceptable, and constructive corporate playgrounds.

2.2. Themes on play and work-related well-being

By taking all the data, and in particular, by paying close attention to the outcomes of the interviews, the following themes in relation to our work-related well-being can be emphasised. I explore each of the major themes in terms of how it was supported by the data, especially from the interviews and focus groups, and also relate this to constructs from Positive Psychology. In addition to this, the next few paragraphs pay particular attention to how these themes are represented in Chapter 4.

Play as fun

One of the primary associations with that we experience with play is that of fun. Play becomes away in which we seek positive arousal. We laugh, we smile, and we enjoy ourselves. Furthermore, workshops as our designated playgrounds have become a place where such experiences are expected. Most of the workshops I have facilitated over the years end up having “fun” as one of the main

expectations. Fun, and positive affect, are therefore particular characteristics of play that provide its appeal. People experience play as a light, enjoyable and pleasant experience. Mostly, the more academic conceptions of play as serious, as articulated by many scholars, lies far from the natural associations people have with play.

The connection between play and positive emotions has received a lot of attention by scholars, both in studying play among children as well as adult populations (Fitzmedrud, 2008; Hoffman, 2003; Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; Wu & Liang, 2011). The suggestion that this makes play and Positive Psychology natural companions has also been reiterated by both Mainemelis and Ronson as well as Fitzmedrud. To offer some explanation of how positive emotional states promote our work-related well-being, Frederickson (2002) has proposed a broaden-and-build theory, basically stating that positive emotion leads to a broadened repertoire of thoughts and behaviours (we have more diverse thoughts and consider engaging with a broader variety of activities), which leads to the building of personal resources, including psychological, mental and physiological resources.

Since positive emotion is therefore clearly linked to both subjective well-being as well as more objective adaptive functioning, it is important to consider how play promotes positive emotion. Without specifically relating this to play, Watson (2002) suggests that positive emotion can be increased in three different ways. Firstly, Watson points out that the involvement in action over thought leads to positive emotion, i.e., doing something actively rather than sitting passively reflecting on something has a greater impact on our positive affect and happiness. Secondly,

Picture 7. Play as fun.



Watson suggests that an emphasis of process instead of product (journey instead of destination) is another proven tactic. His third point is that, since there is inevitable ebb and flow to positive affect, educating people on those rhythmic ups and downs that characterise our emotional life is an important source of understanding and contentment. Stunningly so, the first two tactics that Watson mentions seem to be fundamental properties of play. It could just as well have been said that, in order to increase positive affect, firstly, play. Secondly play. And thirdly, stop to play another day.

The theory of broaden-and-build is reflected throughout the research in the way in which participants describe play as something that allows them to do what they normally won't do (e.g., riding a quad-bike, or dancing). In play, we engage more openly because of positive emotions and by doing so, we walk away enriched. The “comfort-zone” has increased, in the words of our participants. The broaden-and-build theory suggests that because play is fundamentally fun, or has positive affection tied into it, it attracts people into a variety of situations and activities that they would normally avoid. It therefore provides participative safety from which an expanded repertoire of thoughts and behaviours can follow. Many of the interviewees expressed that play allowed them to “think differently,” and “show another part of themselves.” The build part to the theory suggests that this allows people to connect to inner resources for better adaptive functioning, which will be addressed in some of the following themes, notably in stress-relief and resilience.

In Chapter 5, this theme of fun, openness to new activities, and finding how positive affect introduces us to personal and interpersonal nutrients that stimulates our well-being is woven through the text into the experiences of the participants. The workshop story illustrates how play leads to enjoyment, and also to signify how people become participants in the enjoyment-creation process. Somehow, because we had fun, we did different things, we connected in different ways, and we walked away with experiences of wholesomeness and increased subjective well-being.

Play therefore invites us to celebrate positive emotion, to participate in it and to allow it to help us live larger, or a “head taller” (Holzman, 2009).

Play as mind-body integration

From the data in this study, it is clear that despite certain play-forms being more reflective and vicarious, play is often a visceral experience that involves our senses and our bodies. This relates quite strongly with the broaden-and-built ideas expressed above, where participants express that play allowed them to “think” differently, and to “be” differently. This is often expressed as either a left-right brain integration, after the popular work in creativity (Springer & Deutsch, 2001), or as a mind/body integration. Participants express this as “getting in tune with our bodies” “listen to our bodies,” “think differently,” “be creative,” and so forth. It encompasses the experiences of exhilaration and release when we jump and down, dance, hug, stop to smell the flowers, when we kick off our shoes and feel the grass between our toes. One participant expressed it as “I know I am playing when I’m on the ground.” Being on the ground is such an appropriate metaphor, and latches onto ideas of authenticity that we will explore in a moment. Here, it refers to the tactile experience of working with our hands and feet, getting our bodies dirty with the fun stuff of play. In Chapter 4, these ideas are embodied through the parts of play that foster sensory and bodily experiences. On the two opposite sides of the spectrum, it is expressed through the characters of Alister, who represent a cognitive approach, and Minette, who is more sensory and bodily attuned.

Mind-body integration is also a theme that has been cited in related work on adult play and well-being. For example, Legerstee (2007) refers to play as a process of befriending one’s body and developing a “felt sense”, which she describes as “naming and claiming one’s inner body wisdom” (p. 57). Similarly, Oaklander (1997)

Picture 8. Sensory and tactile aspects of play.



describes this as a Gestalt Therapy principle called contact, where we develop the “ability to be fully present in a particular situation with all the aspects of [ourselves] – senses, body, emotional expression, intellect - ready and available for use” (p. 294). Although much of this integration of sensory, creative, and motor aspects with intellectual, cognitive and analytical ones has obvious psychological

benefits, Schaefer (2003) reminds that the benefit can also be expressed as purely biological:

Moving down into the body, we can look at other major systems. When we are laughing, singing, moving about happily, or simply engrossed in a pleasant diversion (i.e., play), we tend to take fuller breaths, thus getting a better oxygen-exchange. (p. 3)

These ideas find echoes and correspondence in from the hillsides of Positive Psychology. Shapiro, Schwartz and Santerre (2002) for example, observe that “human wellness is at once about the mind and the body and their interconnections” (p. 633). Similarly, Dienstbier and Zillig (2002) suggest that “ancient Greeks had it right; mind and body are integrally connected. In modern psychology, we are catching up” (p. 515).

If I may playfully speculate, perhaps we learn in our infant years that we are because we have needs (*I feel, therefore I am*). Later, as we realise that we can make things move and have a physical impact our worlds, we may think that *I move, therefore I am*. And then, we start developing the mental faculties that will grow to dominate our lives and have been the hallmark of modern dualism (*I think, therefore I am*). The risk is that we lose those first few things, and hence, we lose a part of ourselves (*we forget, therefore we are not*). Play therefore invites us, “out of our heads,” so to speak. It encourages a more wholesome embrace of feel, touch, move as well as think. When we as adults play, we tap into ways of knowing things that are pre-verbal: there is more to our lives than we *think*.

Play as authenticity

Plato (“Good reads: Quotes from Plato,” 2011) is often quoted as saying “watch a man at play for an hour and you can learn more about him than in talking to him for a year.” Play’s power to promote spontaneity and carefree expressions was touched on earlier. This is a particularly important

Picture 9. Reclaiming our inner-child



theme expressed by participants in this study. In play, we can drop our guard, let go of the façade, and let our hair down. All of these ideas speak about the burden of maintaining pretences. Play allows us to surrender. Ironically, while one would think that play promotes masks and role-play, the participants in this study reported the contrary.

Authenticity is a topic that, although disparate, is reflected in Positive Psychology as a construct that has received more attention in terms of its absence (Lopez, 2009; Lopez & Snyder, 2009). Harter (2002) suggests that “authenticity involves *owning* one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to ‘know oneself’”(p. 382). In relation to adult play and authenticity, Legerstee (2007) explicitly introduces the concept of “inner child.” In literature, the inner child is depicted as a symbol of regeneration and transformation (Bradshaw, 1991). Whitfield (1987) expresses it as “that part of each of us which is ultimately alive, energetic, creative and fulfilled; it is our Real Self” (p. 9). Palmer (2004), in an inspiring book titled “A hidden wholeness,” speaks about the same idea as a commitment to live “undivided,” a state where there is harmony between the public/performance and private/backstage (role and soul) of our lives. Palmer suggests that, although reclaiming an “inner-child” needs to account for the responsibilities of adult life, such a state can only be achieved by being *hospitable to the soul*. The experiences of participants in play contexts correspond to these ideas. Participants could feel younger by embracing a little silliness. Also, the sheer number of times that children were brought into the conversation when adults play, e.g., “what will my kids say?” or “I remember doing this when I was young” seems to confirm the intimate link play has with the juvenile realm. Harnessing this as a way of renewing our organisations, or rejuvenating our workplace has also been a theme throughout this dissertation, and has been confirmed by people’s sheer embrace of that alive, energetic, creative and fulfilled experience. Although it needs to be noted that the concept of inner child has different connotations in clinical psychology, particularly in reference to childhood hurt, pain and trauma, what is referred to here is the more positive construct of inner-child. It is interesting that Huizinga (1949) traced the word ‘silliness’ to old English origins that closely relate to sacred. Perhaps silliness, childlikeness is something sacred.

It is clear that not all play will automatically contain the hospitality referred to above. Play that is “despite of,” or “at expense of” people would have the opposite effect. This study demonstrates that the right ingredients of compassion, safety, mutuality and freedom seem to be necessary to automatically promoting feelings of authenticity. The interviews, field data, and story of this research furthermore suggest that, given those ingredients, play is associated with innocence, honesty, and openness, in addition to playfulness, creativity and spontaneity. Within Chapter 4, authenticity and spontaneity is reflected in people’s ability to embrace the informal (letting the hair down, dropping the façade) and in openly sharing significant objects from childhood. The overall experience of “coming home,” being able to “be ourselves,” is also reflected in the experiences of participants, particularly in the case of Leon and myself.

Play as community

Community, in addition to commonly referring to a group of people, is also defined as a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals (“New Oxford American Dictionary,” 2006) and has a history of being academically treated in conjunction with concepts such as group cohesiveness and a sense of belonging in social psychology (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Experiences of community relates strongly to all three themes already listed, and this demonstrates the interactive and integrated nature of these play experiences. Notably, authenticity, although framed above as a subjective experience, has a social component, which stretches itself into this theme of community. In the Zulu language, the common greeting “sawubona” literally means “I see you.” By being ourselves, we allow others to “see us.” And when this is reciprocated, the consequence is often an experience of interpersonal intimacy, acceptance and compassion. Other scholars have referred to this as vulnerability-based trust (B. Brown, 2010).

The data suggests that people feel that play “levels the playing field,” and “makes me see others as people.” Our experiences include acceptance, openness, enjoyment with others, increased social support and a strengthened sense of belonging. Moments of play also enter our language and help us construct shared memories. We refer back to the events and metaphors as markers of significant moments in our

shared history. Furthermore, people feel that play has allowed them to build interpersonal awareness and skills to interact more effectively.

Similar ideas are expressed in other studies. For example Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) synthesise some of the related literature and conclude the following:

Informal social play helps people connect to a broader entity – such as their work group, their department, or the organization at large – that provides them with a sense of belonging (Dandridge, 1986; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Marotto, Statler, Victor, & Roos, 2003). Inclusion in informal social play lets group members know that they are part of the group (Duncan, Smeltzer, & Leap, 1990; Roy, 1959), preventing them in that way from feeling alienated (Boland & Hoffman, 1983) (p. 105).

Furthermore, positive relationships are a fundamental topic in Positive Psychology, and on a point of interdependence between these themes, the role of positive emotions, humour, and even aerobic exercise (bodily movements) have all been demonstrated to lead to positive relationships (Carr, 2004; Snyder & López, 2002).

In Chapter 4, these processes are represented by interactive and social play experiences, and are a function intrinsic to play, as well as how play instrumentally leads to conversation. Play therefore invites us into relationships, into dynamic interactions, mutuality, reciprocity, relational proximity and even intimacy. These experiences can be momentary or can lead to lasting friendships.

Play as stress-relief, coping and resilience

The last significant theme that has a direct bearing on play and well-being is that of stress relief and resilience. Participants in this study experienced play as relaxing, refreshing, rejuvenating, informal, and as a way to balance work and life. In addition to this, some play forms were experienced as a time of disengagement from work that allowed for recuperation and reframing, in order to re-engage with fresh perspective and renewed energy. The interdependencies between these previously mentioned themes reach a new height in the instance of stress relief and resilience. It can be clearly seen that play relieves stress because it is fun, it incorporates physical movement and aerobic exercise, and it stimulates sensory appreciation. Furthermore,

Picture 10. Play and stress-relief.



we stop carrying heavily on our roles and masks, and we engender a sense of community that leads to social support that possibly alleviates interpersonal conflicts.

While therefore definitely relieving stress, the experiences of play also went further in terms of assisting people to cope and respond to stressors. Russell (2008) links this effect of play to the development of resilience through its ability to enhance our adaptive systems. In his review, Russell suggests that play accomplishes this through a variety of means, and while he offers detailed analysis of this, a few elements which relate to ideas already expressed here includes the regulation of negative emotion, facilitation of positive emotion, promotion of risk-taking, creativity, learning, as well as developing positive attachments. In related harmonies, Sutton-Smith (2001) calls this adaptive potentiation: “play’s function is most centrally that of emotional joy and emotional peace, but its variant actions must inevitably provide some trickle down of functional transfers - a kind of functioning” (p. 19).

This adaptive potentiation, the ability to bounce back, to address challenges with a renewed sense of both effort and skill, to overcome and transcend, have all been hallmark characteristics of resilience and abound in literature on play.

In the data gathered in this study, play’s role in offering a safe harbour, a platform for rejuvenation in order to re-engage, has been constantly present. People could return to work with a refreshed ability to cope with what, only a few days before, felt like an impossible task. In Chapter 4, this idea is represented as the very motive for calling a “time-out,” having “team-days,” days of learning, opportunities to “sharpen the saw.” The stress relief that is inherent to the other experiences of play (laughter, fun, bodily movements, sensory stimulation, etc.) is also purposefully incorporated. In addition, the ability to symbolise stressors external to ourselves (a drawing of graves next to the road) allows for an acknowledgement, a regulation of negative emotion, an acceptance of others (“we see you”), and consequently, a re-integration in terms of reframing and re-engagement (De Klerk, 2007). This

conversation is also deliberately mirrored through the conversation about resilience, with its constituents of “rejuvenate,” “relate” and “reframe.”

In addition then to “chillaxing” (chill and relax) through play, play goes further in also inviting us to reframe, and build psychological and relational resources and experiment with different possibilities that assist our adaptive functioning outside of play. It is a momentary disengagement (or divergence) with an explicit purpose to re-engage in ways that is more productive and more fulfilling.

Two more loose ends

There were two more significant themes that emerged from the participants that have not been listed above as their direct relationship to well-being is mediated through the themes already mentioned. They nevertheless came out strongly enough to represent a loose end worthy of mentioning and tying up. Because of their prominence, these ideas have also been incorporated into the narrative in Chapter 4.

Firstly, the symbolic nature of play allows for it to speak to our reality. When we stand back from play and reflect about the process, it mirrors something outside of the playground. For example, one colleague pessimistically said that the task was impossible. Through play, he discovered that it was indeed possible, and this sparked an insight in terms of other areas of our lives where we fall into a pre-mature, unwarranted nay-saying. We connect the imaginary aspects of play with very real aspects of life, and play casts a new light on non-play. In fact, not only is play derived from experiences in reality, but when we engage our reality with a renewed understanding that we gained in play, our perspective on reality changes. In fact, we can then say that reality takes its cue from play, and not the other way around. This experience regarding the play-based methods in this study was quite prevalent, and is also reported in other studies. Fitzmedrud (2008) for example refers to this as the transformative power of play, where, by interacting and crossing boundaries between inner and outer realities, we manage to integrate and transform both those realities.

The second theme that emerged is how play allows us to express taboos, and hence raise, or subvert a phenomenon that is difficult to talk about. There is a naughtiness that is allowed in play because we can claim that we are merely joking or playing. Yet, many a true word is said in jest. In play, a son may hit his dad and an

employee may call his/her boss a slave-driver. We can actively rebel against societal norms, experiment with an expanded behavioural repertoire, and we can do so without the normal consequences thereof. Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) suggest that we “find in informal social play an illicit voice for criticism, dissent, and autonomy, and an impudent voice that crosses hierarchical lines” (p. 107). This serves both intra-personal functions as well as inter-personal functions in terms of identity formation, as we see when Silverstone (1999) says that “in play we have license to explore both ourselves and our society” (p. 64). It also serves a different function off allowing for difficult subjects and sensitivities to be raised in an environment that allows for it (Heracleous & Jacobs, 2005).

From the above discussion, I hope to demonstrate how the themes of play that came from fieldwork, interviews and a focus group are supported in literature. I also actively leaned on literature to gain a better understanding of processes at play in them. Finally, by explicitly linking these to common concepts in Positive Psychology, the links between play and work-related well-being were explored and illuminated. The discussion is meant to be explorative and indicative of areas for further studies while, at the same time, offering a convincing case that play, as revealed in this study, undoubtedly plays into the areas of well-being as explicated. Despite that, this remains the first few steps in understanding more broadly how play relates to work-related well-being, and more in-depth work on each of these themes is still needed. In order to bring this chapter to a close, I wish to build on these themes by reflecting how, by doing research playfully, the combination of play and work further contributes to positive affect, holism, authenticity, community, and resilience.

3. Reflections on studying play playfully

The idea of studying play playfully was one that came to me early on in the process. It seemed appropriate and fitting in terms of matching methodology with research subject. The idea of thinking about this, not only as an approach, but also as a part of this study, really only really occurred to me during the writing process. Play is not only an approach to the study, but my playful approach to this study is in itself the subject – another angle on the subject that exists in parallel with the study of play-

based methods in workshop contexts. This at first seemed whacky and quirky, and sent an excited shiver down my spine. As with any novel idea, it now seems mundane and not too unusual, but there was still that quirky and whacky “aha” when I first thought about it. If nothing else, this idea communicates strongly that the container of research (i.e., a dissertation being the container of knowledge about play) is not neutral to the study of play, but an essential part of it. It therefore also celebrates the trend in qualitative research of reflecting on the research journey as essential to the research process.

So, as a less explicit undertone to the storyline, I want to explore what this has taught me about play at work in the next few pages. Let it be known, right off the bat, that I think that the lack of play in approaching research has been more evident than a focus on it. I therefore don’t think that I have been very successful in doing this, as will be clarified in more detail. My attempts resulted in sporadic, unstable and occasional tastes of play. It has been a bumpy ride, with long stretches that spoke only of duty and obligation. Nevertheless, small seeds of playfulness and play were constantly present, whether I did this consciously or subconsciously. Right through the process of conceptualising the research proposal, using funky creative mediums to pitch a research proposal, designing playful interventions as the basis for the data gathering, as well as incorporating play as either purposeful distractions, creative engagements, or simply motivational conditions, play has featured throughout. It is interesting that, similar to sentiments expressed by people I interviewed, play easily gets pushed to the background and ends up restricted to our subconscious. We don’t know that we play, and other priorities and duties override the light, joyful, and creative expressions of play. But the moment we bring it to the fore again, there is a sense of “Aha! There it is!” We recognise the smell of the roses and know it was roses all along. So as I write this, it is at least joyful in retrospect, even if the process itself sometimes lost sight of it.

Despite whether there has been a lack of play, or whether it slipped off the radar, I would still gauge the approach I followed as more playful than much of the research being done in social sciences. Also, even an awareness of the lack of play is probably something relatively unique to this study. I therefore trust that this reflection on the meta-narrative can bring insight into how we can conduct social science research in

ways that are more “alive,” or how to regain ourselves in the research, instead of losing ourselves completely. To then reflect and gauge how I managed (or mostly did not manage) to bring play into the research, I will structure this conversation in the already familiar categories of firstly writing about some of the play-based methods I used in the process of doing research. Secondly, I will then critically consider the effect of these methods on play, before concluding with some ideas that could perhaps assist researchers in future.

3.1. Play-based methods in doing research

In an attempt to give the reader a taste of the play-methods that I deliberately incorporated throughout the study, I’ll discuss this along the classic lines of data gathering, data analysis and data representation. In the subsequent sections, this is respectively called field play, head play and text play.

Field play

Using play in fieldwork has been evident in a few ways, some deliberate and some more unconscious. A good example is the use of photos that were often taken, not in a deliberate attempt to capture research data, but in moments of play. Often, it was those unconscious moments when we simply played and took photos in the offbeat and offline moments that prove the most helpful. In contrast to data gathering methods that relies on surveys and calculations, photos also introduced a clear and distinct embrace of emotion, colour and context.

Another clear example was the playful transformation of a focus group. Instead of bringing everyone together, asking questions, and writing answers on flipcharts, we played out our memories and built metaphors into the whole process. The interactive and symbolic nature of the brown paper exercise as a method of capturing data was also useful. This was mostly a collaborative effort, and I recall engaging moments of latching on to metaphors, experimenting with ideas, sharing wild ideas we had that we had not yet tested, and so forth. Coming up with work that had a quality of play felt both fun and meaningful. I have included some of these photos in Annexure A along with other photos from the field.

Picture 11. Creating our own weather or go crazy.



A final example, or perhaps non-example, was when I did the interviews. I wanted to introduce playful approaches in the interviews themselves, and therefore included questions that relied on metaphor as well as free-flow brainstorming. I also thought about a few other ways, such as asking them to write their attitudes related to play on a balloon, or to draw a picture that symbolises work and play for them. Given the short time I had with interviewees, as well as the uncomfortable nature of some of the methods, I decided against it.

These methods of data gathering depart from the more traditional approaches that try to clinically control the environment, and not confound the result. But as has been argued, even those methods are by their nature biased. They are just more biased to more cognitive and analytical approaches, and offer a stronger voice to experiences that can be accurately expressed in such terms.

This research invites future qualitative researchers to think of gathering data in more playful approaches that range from deliberate to subtle. More methods are needed, and more emphasis on what those methods offer is definitely required. My experience was that it succeeds in engaging people, taps different memories, brings ideas to life and leaves us with insights that other methods lack.

Head play

Much of adult play happens in our minds. We play with ideas and we play with words all the time. Even though I tried to incorporate play into the analysis component of the research, this was probably the most resistant part of the process. Play does not easily lend itself to serious analysis, in my experience. Serious analysis is about finding truth, taking things apart, and finding “right” answers. In the context of research, it is also about defending those answers against scepticism. This part of the research therefore felt the least like play, and I wonder what the possibilities would be if we experimented more with our analysis and interpretations.

The analysis and interpretation, for me, was also mostly a solitary effort. I prepared some Excel spread sheets, made lists, developed tagging and coding systems, and went through every piece of data with some rigour in order to tag and code it. The part of this that I most enjoyed was the trip down memory lane. Living into the photos and journal notes of past experiences was a little bit like fantasy play, walking into an imaginary world that once existed, of which I tended to only remember the good parts. Needing to tag them, synthesise, and then compare that to literature and theory was devoid of play, and I still wonder how I could do this differently. Two ideas come to mind.

Firstly, I could find ways to make it more collaborative. For most of the participants in this study, and definitely for me, play experience was amplified in social settings. It is the social and interactive dynamic that triggers and promotes play. Secondly, it occurred to me that analysis could be helped if we find creative ways of representing data. This point hints towards the interdependent nature of data analysis and data representation, as is often observed. A good example of this is the popularity of infographs that we find splashed over the Internet, and an example of Angry Birds and psychology is attached in Annexure F. Such an approach brings a creative and playful approach to both data analysis and representation, but also leans more towards quantitative research. I also made an attempt at doing this and pulled up a few word clouds from the responses of participants. These can be found in Annexure D.

My overall effort of playing in the process of analysis and interpretation represented but a brief pause, and given the tight deadlines and need to start writing, I gave up on some of my play efforts. An important lesson is therefore that play may

lack utmost efficiency in getting tasks done. The key benefits of play rest, not necessarily in efficiency and quantity, but in its motivational, qualitative and therefore sustainable aspects.

Text play

Similar to the head play, the work of representing our data and producing text is mostly work in front of our computers. And, similar to analysis, I found this a difficult task to compliment with play. Over the last few weeks of doing this, this activity has all but consumed me. Even when I'm not writing, I find my mind mulling over phrases and I am constantly preoccupied with ideas that I formulate and reformulate. Now and again, I had the discipline to jot them down for later use, which I probably did only 20% of the time. Often, I would simply stop myself from brooding over my work by finding some sort of productive or unproductive distraction.

But, allowing the writing style to relax into something accepting of metaphor, jokes, personal writing and story, probably represented the biggest effort in doing this. Writing in this way, while still being hard and even more difficult than writing clinically and "scientifically," has also been satisfying, creative, and engaging. Since this required a lot of effort and time, I also experimented with a few other playful approaches worth considering. I'll briefly explain these approaches by grouping them into three categories.

Creating our own weather. Firstly, there are the methods of creating a playful, motivated and stimulating environment to work in. I did this by pulling up action lists in colour, creating count-down cards, writing inspirational quirky quotes (often with swearwords) on post-it notes, putting up a large board with photos and shout-outs from friends and family, and playing certain music tracks (such as John Mayer's "Crossroads") just as I was about to start a new section. There is also the well-known Pomodoro Technique (Cirillo, n.d.), a method often used in time management. I used the technique to help me forget about the sheer magnitude of the task, to focus on small steps, to work against avoidance by activating myself, and to symbolise and visualise my progress. We divorce ourselves from the overwhelming perceptions we have about the task by replacing the work with the playful habit of taking a few bites. The normal consequence, for me, is that I then found myself productively working for

hours, non-stop. The board with photos and shout-outs from friends and colleagues, aside from being encouraging, were also useful reminders about why I was doing this in the first place. It was also necessary to keep me from going crazy, as is evident in the photo provided below. I had a whole crowd that was cheering me along on my way up the mountain.

Picture 12. Meaningful distractions.



Meaningful distractions. Secondly, there have been the play-based methods that I used as a clear divergence from work in an attempt to distract myself, relieve the stress, gain fresh perspectives and more. I took jogs, played TV games, went down to the Vaal River to ski for a weekend, and more. In doing this, I adopted one of two philosophies. The first was to see play as a reward for hard work. Even though I, in the conceptualisation of this study, set myself completely against this idea, it remains an important part of play's potential. Even though play shouldn't just be side-line activities in relation to work, I need play to be that too. The second philosophy I adopted was that play as distraction brought me into spaces that could re-energise me, in order to re-engage in productive and creative ways. Altogether, play as meaningful distraction helped me to "pretend" that life is not that hard, to maintain my sanity, and importantly, to keep an overall appreciation of a good life amidst a research process that has the potential of feeling like a black hole. The ideal is to use play to reframe and transform the black hole. But while failing to do so, play as a clear divergence from work does a lot to keep us sane while allowing us to still engage those difficult patches with a sense of purpose and well-being. It was also useful as an energiser and injection to bring fresh perspective and effort to the work.

Engaging creatively. Lastly, there were also the moments where I used play to engage work directly. The main methods I used here were narrative and metaphor, which was the deliberate decision I made about the project from the start. Splashed out on all the pages of this dissertation are the play of words, ideas, stories, humour, and more. I included collages, photos and represented notes, tables and lists as part of a playbook. Two important ideas stand out in relation to this. Firstly, this is normally the type of play that is strictly forbidden in scientific research. It is a taboo. I had to

make a deliberate decision to do this, and to face the consequences. But overall, I am hoping that the style of writing, and the presence of metaphor and narrative, has made this dissertation more accessible. I also trust that a playful read would result in renewed energy, fun, inspiration and the ability to transform the dull bits of our lives with a bit of play. The second comment is that, ironically, play has been incredibly hard. For starters, I found myself contending with the voices of self-doubt and inadequacy. So, to potentially suck but to do it with confidence had to become a mantra to overcome these voices. But aside from the voices, I have deep-rooted tendencies to only play in ways that absolve me from commitment. Players in all walks of life, sport, art, music, drama, and now, organisationally, would attest to this point: that playing and playing well is hard work. But I believe now that it is in choosing a disciplined play that I inspire my outputs and maintain my connection to both work as well as co-worker. If we continue opting for the play that is easy and accessible, we will only get the mediocre accomplishments that come by not putting in the effort. And if we put in all the effort and maintain a strong posture of duty, we risk killing our work by estranging ourselves from it.

3.2. Play and “research-related well-being”

From the above discussion, I trust that how I complemented the study with play and play-methods is fairly clear, but there are more questions related to the effect of play on both the research as well as the researchers. While leaving the assessment of the effect on the research to the examiner and reader, the question I can attempt an authentic answer to is how it impacted on me. This research has framed the question of effect in terms of work-related well-being, so I am deliberately playing with a phrase that I have never heard considered. What is the effect of playful research on the research-related well-being of the researcher? Why does research have to do anything to the researcher? Is this not a self-sacrificial and humble undertaking to impact the world, rather than a narcissistic and self-centred project that should benefit the author/researcher? When I think about these criticisms, it strikes me that the critique towards autoethnography, that it is unwarrantedly self-centred, also reflects the greater wellness problem in our workplaces. People are human resources. And scholars and researchers are, similarly, professional and academic resources.

As an autoethnographic study, these questions are however brought to the centre, and I feel encouraged to reflect on it in more detail. While acknowledging that I have already ventured into some of these reflections in section 3.1., I will structure the following discussion by referring specifically to the well-being related themes that came out of the research. Earlier, I articulated that the effects of play in relation to our work-related well-being stood out in a few distinct ways. The role of positive affect or fun, the effect of greater mind-body integration, ideas of authenticity and recovering our inner child, positive experiences of community as well as meaningful stress relief and resilience, were all addressed in detail. The following paragraphs explore how, in small yet meaningful ways, playing with research also contributed to these aspects.

Research and fun

On a number of occasions throughout this research project, I caught myself sitting back with a sense of...what is that? Could it be amusement, joy, or satisfaction? While writing some of the paragraphs, I would sense a smile form around my mouth. I was indeed enjoying it! In moments that I managed to connect metaphor and story meaningfully with what I was busy writing, the unexpected linkages and delightful creativity brought about those moments that sustained me. I would wonder if the reader would get the joke I buried in the text, the subtle nuances and whether the symbolic that I saw would also speak to the reader. Unlike traditional science, there is a kind of game being played, where clarity and brevity are not the most important things. I hide some of what I am saying in layered nuances, in hope that if the reader discovers them, there would be a connection. I wink at my reader, and cue for him or her to play along. Research and writing can be fun! There were many good moments. Writing about joyful occasions, when I read something interesting and funny, nostalgic moments with photographs and data, playful interactions with interviewees, all contributed to the positive affectivity that from time to time accompanied the research and writing. I can also honestly say that the overall mood of the research, especially in doing the fieldwork, was joyful and animated. Play has that effect, and it makes me think back about those processes with a sense of pride.

But towards the latter part of this project, the mood was less joyful. The looming deadlines, the need to “get through the work,” the sense of risk, feelings of shame that

it has taken me so long, feelings of guilt towards my study leaders and my wife, all played their part. There was a storm sweeping across the mountain I was climbing, and I didn't prepare properly or plan well enough to make use of the good weather. The storm has rendered the bit of play I attempted incapable of penetrating the dark clouds. Howling winds of deadlines and pressure interfere with the whistling while we walk. It would seem to me that play and positive affectivity is mediated by a play context. Under conditions of fear, risk, shame, and guilt, play becomes less impactful and positive affect dissipates. In fact, the play context influences whether play activity results in the psychosocial experience of play, or whether we simply go through the motions. This is an important lesson. Some of what parades as play lacks the fundamental properties of true play.

Research and mind-body integration

This research, on the one hand, aimed to provide a more colourful and animated rendering of research. While its impact on the profession and the reader remains to be judged, there is a distinct benefit to the researcher. At times, I would get stuck on a paragraph and would then switch over to "easier work," such as building a collage with the photos, or reading over some of the story elements I had written. Listening to music, using coloured pens to draw out ideas, building a clay object to express an idea I was trying to formulate, all added to the richness. Other times, I would stand up and imagine I was back in a workshop; I would reflect about the facilitation and the experience and I would re-enact some of those experiences.

The other thing about our bodies is that they are geographically bound. We exist in time and space, and our bodies draw from the richness in our environment. At times, I would grab my laptop and books and go and sit in a social environment, away from my desk, in an attempt to break the monotony by bringing my body into different spaces and postures. At first, I thought about this as simply avoiding cabin fever. Later, I started thinking about this as expressions of variety, social connectedness, mind-body integration and play. On occasions, I would order a beer (after 12pm, of course) in a clear defiance of work etiquette and would playfully approach my work while joyfully observing the people around me. One particular location close to our house is a restaurant with a large playpen. Sitting there, with the shouts and shrieks of kids running around, has offered needed variation, stimulation

and reflections that would not have been possible if I remained in my head. Our heads get in the way. The voices of criticism and inadequacy drown out the creative and playful. Play has helped me balance those voices by introducing vivid, colourful and animated experiences throughout the writing process.

Little of what I studied about research methodology taught me about balancing head, heart and body, in the process of research. We are encouraged to do mostly head work. I wonder at the depths of research. When I draw a picture or schematic of what I am studying, look at a photo, listen to music, connect content to symbolism and metaphor (deductively or inductively), stand up and re-enact moments, or physically rearrange myself and my surroundings, my mind feels stimulated and deeper memories are triggered. We know things in play, when we allow for spontaneity and intuitive expression, that we don't know otherwise. I also believe that social science research can greatly benefit by adopting more of these methods, notably in intercultural research that embraces more than just the spoken word, or perhaps phenomenological studies, where our non-verbal experiences are also of essence.

Research and authenticity

When we play, we drop our guard, our facade and our postures of seriousness and importance. We realise that just being ourselves is enough. We, so to speak, leak ourselves onto the pages of our text and research reports as much as onto the social canvasses of our play experiences with others. Perhaps, this is what has been so terrifying about the writing process, leaking ourselves. In writing Chapters 4 and 5, there have been moments where I got so stuck, that I had to learn to let go of my inhibitions. I had to make a conscious decision not to worry about the quality of the writing or the completeness of the representations. These marked times where I had to close the other books, the references and articles, the data, and everything external, and write as if from some unknown fountain from inside of me.

This is nerve-wracking, make no mistake. As a master's student, much of the fear for legitimacy is managed by finding clever people that agree with us. We wonder what will happen if we can't justify what we're writing with things other people said. Who cares what I think? And therein lies the huge mistake that accounts for wasted days and weeks on what was going on outside of me, what others have said

and my feeble attempts to hide myself behind the learned words of world-renowned scholars. This is not playful and does not lead to authenticity.

I'm not so sure if play as authenticity stands out as an experience I often had in this research, perhaps more towards the end, and as I got into the flow of writing. In that case, this research at least points to the antithesis. Without play, without playful letting go and *deliberate leakage*, we end up rehashing the words, ideas and lives of other people. We lose ourselves in work. And I pray that the experiences I had in writing that felt true and reflective of my authentic self, is something I will hold on to and pursue when I return to writing, when this piece of work that has often been characterised by drudgery more than joy, is behind me.

Research and community

I already mentioned that I don't believe I always succeeded in approaching this research with a playful attitude. Overridden by the desire to finish off, the idea did not haunt me as much as it should have. If I failed in that, it meant that a part of the research was a hoax. On one of the days that I dedicated to writing, I drove out to one of the restaurants close by our house while I reflecting this dilemma. Why has it been so difficult for me to experience research as playful at times? I thought about my experiences in play and my mind also wandered to how many of the interviewees had intimately linked play to the social interactions they had experienced.

And then it hit me. I was alone. Despite the award-winning efforts from Anne-Marie to stand by me, to read my stuff and even to transcribe one of the interviews, much of what I was doing took place in a solitary space, an inside world that started becoming bigger than my outside world. People often say that as you progress through academic ranks, you start to know a lot about very little. The smallness of my inside world was aggravated by the loneliness I experienced. This experience was strongly confirmed for me when I got an editor on-board to review my first few chapters. The interaction with this editor was both exciting and exposing. For the first time in months, I was getting feedback on what I had written. It stimulated me, made me want to play and contend for her respect and approval, and pick up my game. When someone listens to us, when we are cognisant of our audience, whether that audience is ourselves, other players, coaches, spectators or even the audience of

One,²⁵ we pick up our game and we play better. One of my biggest mistakes in this research project was revealed to me. I played myself into an isolated corner.

I am reminded of the tragic story of Chris McCandless, captured in the beautiful and moving biography written by Jon Krakauer (1996). Chris, a talented young man and devoted Christian, inspired by the writings of Tolstoy, renounces civilisation in pursuit of a “refuge in nature.” He tragically dies after getting trapped by melted rivers. In his journal, towards the end of his life, he wrote the following: “And so it turns out that only a life similar to the life of those around us, merging with it without a ripple, is genuine life, and that unshared happiness is not happiness...HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED” (p. 189). I am starting to think that play is only real when shared.

Without negating the presence and importance of solitary play, a tremendous amount of play benefit seems to draw its magic from sharing it with others. It reminds me of the powerful idea of solitude in community (Palmer, 2004). It comprises a dance between solitude and community. Community benefits from the authentic expressions I can offer of myself because I can play in solitude, and the solitude is enhanced by the knowledge that there is a community that shares, applauds, respects and affirms that authenticity. I would therefore invite researchers to find ways to collaborate with others throughout their research as a means of play. Bounce ideas off each other. Read each other small snippets of what you are writing. When I managed to do these, it greatly enhanced both play and work in relation to the research. Unfortunately, this element of play is again proven in this research, not by its abundance, but by its neglect.

Research and stress-relief or resilience

Where play has helped me with stress relief and resilience during the research process, it related more closely to activities previously described as *meaningful distractions*. Let us explore a practical example of what this looks like, and how it relates to resilience. Just before writing this paragraph, I decided to take a break. Because of rainy weather, Anne-Marie and I went to the gym instead of taking our usual jog in the neighbourhood. A cricket game, where South Africa gave Australia a

²⁵ This is a popular phrase in certain Christian circles to denote a reverence to God alone as our ultimate audience.

good beating, distracted us from the workout and I ended up walking lazily on the treadmill while watching cricket highlights, where Hashim Amla and AB De Villiers put on a fantastic partnership.

I saw Jacques Kallis, the same cricketer that the previous day hit a half-century which allowed him to claim a record-breaking 12,000 career runs, walk away from the pitch with a mere 2 runs. Cricket, hiking in mountains, life, it is all a game of ups and downs, and learning to deal with those ebbs and flows, learning to come back the next day and pretend that yesterday's failure doesn't matter, is an essential life-skill. C.S. Lewis (2001), the classic Christian author, writes about this pretend play in the following way:

One is the story you have all read called Beauty and the Beast. The girl, you remember, had to marry a monster for some reason. And she did. She kissed it as if it were a man. And then, much to her relief, it really turned into a man and all went well. The other story is about someone who had to wear a mask; a mask which made him look much nicer than he really was. He had to wear it for a year. And when he took it off he found his own face had grown to fit it. He as now really beautiful. What had begun as disguise had become a reality. (p. 187)

While on the treadmill, I imagine myself living life with a sense of discipline and determination. I upped the speed and then beat a protesting body into submission by running for 20 minutes flat out. Every step of the way, I imagine being Jacques Kallis, getting back onto the pitch and facing the next ball with no memory of the previous one, and no awareness of how much further I must still go. In the case of my research, I imagine shifting back into gear and writing a few more pages. I draw inspiration from Kallis and forget about how far I still need to go. I focus on the next paragraph, and I write. By stepping away, by engaging play as stress relief, I draw inspiration from a fresh environment, the presence of people in challenging situations, and I manage to bounce back with a sense of perspective and purpose.

Over the last few weeks, after spending 4-5 hours writing, my head would inevitably feel clouded, like having the 'flu but without the other muscle aches. I become numb and feel blunt. When this happens, nothing clears me up like a jog or even watching an episode of one of our favourite TV series together with Anne-Marie. More than just giving me a break, it serves a few other purposes. Firstly, it connects

me to ideas, material and insights that would have been out of my reach. We watch cricket, we think about facing the next ball and forgetting about the run-rate or the final target. On the mountain, I realise that while walking up a steep incline that stretches for two kilometres and ascends for one, the worst thing I can do is to keep my eye on the target. Instead, I focus on putting one foot in front of the other. And I do this 50, or 100, or 150 times. Only then do I look up. And instead of only looking at the distance that remains, I first throw a quick glance at how far I have come. With that perspective, I look up again, and the end-result, that mountain, the intimidating goal, feels a little more achievable. In this vein, we can think about research and writing as a paragraph-by-paragraph kind of activity. Distractions connected me to ideas regarding my dissertation that I otherwise would not have had. I allow me to feel re-energised, focused and motivated.

Finally, these meaningful distractions also helped with stress-relief and resilience because it allowed me to put the research project in its rightful place. My life does not equal work, and the moment that I project the fullness of my life (my satisfaction, my well-being, my happiness, my fulfilment, positive relationships, etc.) *purely* on work, I have given work more responsibility that it can ever bear. I would have turned work and workplace into some sort of god. Not work, nor workplace, no employer and no colleague can do all those things for us. To be completely honest, not even play can do all of that. But, by embracing play as a meaningful distraction, I relieve stress, I reframe a problem, and I also gain perspective of where this problem fits into my life. I remember that life is about more than this. And with that perspective, this thing doesn't have to weigh that much. I learn not to take myself too seriously.

4. Chapter summary

In the preceding pages of this chapter, I have traversed my own journey in this research as an honest, reflexive confession. It covered the story about what has led to this research, the difficulty in finding a research topic that felt meaningful, how I navigated some of the decisions around methodology, as well as the iterative process of data gathering, analysis, interpretation and representation. In the second section, I discussed in detail how I analysed and synthesised the key themes in this research. I did so by comparing the experiences in the field with standing theory which delivered, firstly, a preliminary taxonomy that is offered as a work-in-progress that helped me to

consciously reflect and learn about the practise and principles of play facilitation. Secondly, I discussed in detail how a few emergent themes in play relate to our work-related well-being by looking at these through the lens of positive psychological constructs. Finally, I reflected deeply about what a playful approach to play can teach us about play at work, and suggest that a playful approach can also help research to feel more energised, vibrant, meaningful and experimental. These points were often argued in terms of its absence, rather than its presence.

While not oblivious to the fact that this research journey has been far from perfect, in instances lacked rigour, has been incomplete and often exposed my own tendencies to engage play as an escape instead of a creative entry to work, I believe this tale reflects authenticity and integrity. I can therefore claim, without a doubt, that it has been both an ethical and progressive step in qualitative research as well as autoethnography. Tales of hiking in the mountains without the back-end truth of hardships, failures, bad decisions and moments of weakness, amounts to nothing but false marketing. Such stories will reveal such pursuits, in mountains or in the hills of research, to fall short from our blown-up expectations. It reminds me of Jon Krakauer (1996), who wrote the following about projecting false dreams and blown-up hopes onto such pursuits:

I thought climbing the Devil's Thumb would fix all that was wrong with my life. In the end, of course, it changed almost nothing. But I came to appreciate that mountains make poor receptacles for dreams. (p. 155)

To make it worth it, we need to take into consideration that such journeys are not an answer to life, or substitute for life, but simply an extension to life. We find on such journeys what we bring along with us in the first place. It is therefore with great joy that, by choosing this particular research journey of autoethnography, I could manage to discover what I bring to a research journey, and not just what I took from it. This is the home-coming of autoethnography, when we reach the end of the journey. In the poetic words of Elliot (1971, p. 145):

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.