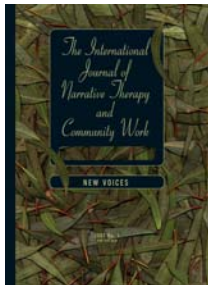


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In each issue, practitioners from a range of different countries discuss the ideas and practices that are inspiring them in their work, the dilemmas they are grappling with, and the issues most dear to their hearts. Their writings are easy-to-read while remaining rigorous and thoughtful. The first section of each issue revolves around a particular theme, while the second consists of a collection of practice-based papers on various topics. The journal is produced four times a year. If you wish to stay in touch with the latest developments in narrative practice, we hope you will subscribe and become a part of our community of readers!



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# 2

## **Publishing: linking practitioners, sharing ideas and creating community through the written word**

*Since the 17th century, magazines have been a peculiarly modern device for bringing a public space into existence. Like a town meeting, a magazine enables people to be in each other's company by sharing talk about matters that concern them. And it is through talking with others that most of us start to make some sense of the world, and begin to discover who we are and what we think. (Denneny 1984, p.13)*

These words from Michael Denneny seem an appropriate place to begin a chapter focusing on how publishing can link practitioners, share ideas, and create community through the written word. From the early days of Dulwich Centre Publications, the emphasis has been on creating a forum in the written word which will spark and sustain conversations between practitioners and continue to build and support a community of ideas.

In this chapter, we will try to describe some of the principles that influence our work as publishers; we'll share some handy hints for those of you who are interested in writing up your work; and we will tell some stories along the way! First though, let's take a glimpse back in time ...

## **A glimpse of history**

The history of how Dulwich Centre Publications came about is quite interesting as there was never any thought of starting a publishing house! Twenty years ago, here in Adelaide, some therapists began to share their work in free forums that involved short presentations on particular ideas and then rigorous debate and discussion. Cheryl initiated these forums and they were open to anyone interested in the particular topic being addressed. There was so much energy and interest in the presentations that it seemed a good idea to write these down and a small news-sheet was developed for this purpose. Links were generated between a range of local practitioners and these first news-sheets were simply a way to continue the conversations. Over time, people from other places requested copies of the news-sheets and it gradually turned into a journal<sup>1</sup>. Interest in the ideas continued to grow and, in 1989, Dulwich Centre Publications published its first book, *Literate Means to Therapeutic Ends*, by David Epston and Michael White.

Fast forward twenty years, and there is now a substantial body of work written by narrative therapists and community workers published in different parts of the world. Dulwich Centre Publications alone has published over twenty books and countless journal articles and stories of practitioners' work<sup>2</sup>. If a therapist is seeking writing about the use of narrative approaches with someone experiencing a particular difficulty, there is a good chance such a piece of writing now exists<sup>3</sup>.

The works we have published have included scholarly, rigorous books that have led to narrative ideas gaining credibility and recognition in many different circles. We have also published a range of moving first person testimonies from individuals and groups, as well as introductory, how-to-do-it practice-based writings. Having the flexibility of publishing both books and journals means that we are able to maintain a balance between these different sorts of texts.

## **Working with stories and linking practitioners**

Like therapists, novelists, playwrights, journalists and many others, publishers work with stories. Articles are submitted to us, or sometimes we go out looking for them, and then by publishing them, they

are shared with readers. In our work, we are interested in particular types of stories. We choose to publish papers that are of direct relevance to therapists and community workers.

The written word can be a powerful medium for linking people together. We often hear how an article written by a therapist about their conversations with a certain person has been read by another counsellor and then shared with someone they are consulting with. Or we receive papers that have been inspired by earlier writings. A clear example of this is how the article by Lisa McPhie and Chris Chaffey (1999): 'The journey of a lifetime: Group work with young women who have experienced sexual assault', has influenced a number of other practitioners as far afield as Hong Kong to develop similar groups using artwork and evocative descriptions of the landscapes traversed (Siu-wai 2004; Yau 2004).

Sometimes links are made across different countries and cultures. The creative work of Yvonne Sliap and local counselors in Malawi involved engaging village communities in externalising conversations to talk about HIV/AIDS (Sliap et al. 1996). Yvonne and her team had developed ways of working with communities that built upon cultural knowledges and histories and that created the opportunity to bring difficult topics out into the open. In 1996, Cheryl, Jane and David travelled to Malawi to document this work and, once it was written up and distributed, it inspired Indigenous Australian health worker Barbara Wingard. Barbara then created a number of programs including 'Talking with Sugar (Diabetes)' and 'Talking with Grief'<sup>4</sup>. It is a long way from rural Australia where Barbara lives, to rural Malawi, but ideas can travel vast distances via the written word.

Conversations can be sparked in many different places through the publication of a single story. These are the sorts of conversations that contribute to a community of ideas.

### **The relationship between reading, writing and publishing**

While some consider that reading and writing are solitary pursuits, this is not our experience:

*There is a widespread view that reading is essentially a solitary, even an anti-social activity ... Certainly reading appears to be a solitary activity: one*

*shuts the world out to read, seeking out places ... where one will be undisturbed. But perhaps it is less about being alone and more about choosing one's company.*

*Certainly I have never felt alone while reading. In fact, reading has always seemed to me to be a particularly deep and satisfying form of intimacy ... For the time it takes to read a substantial work – scattered inevitably, over a period of days or weeks – we give our complete attention to another. We hold ourselves in suspension as we allow another to unfold their ideas, or, in the case of fiction, their fantasies, for us. We even collude with them in bringing those ideas to life, permitting ourselves for a time to think their thoughts, to look through their eyes ...*

*But reading ... is more than an especially meaningful conversation ... it is also profoundly social. The relationships we have with books, the people we become when we read, the emotions that traverse us with the words of another – these constitute ... an experience of communion ... (Priest 2004, p.162-166)*

With these words, Anne-Marie Priest eloquently describes how her experience of reading is social and relational. As far as we are concerned, the acts of writing and publishing are the other side of this relationship. Publishing involves maintaining relations with individual readers and a collective readership. These relations are two-way. Readers' suggestions and feedback significantly shape everything that we do. In fact, almost every major publishing project we have engaged in has been the result of requests and feedback from readers.

Over the last two decades we have become linked with a diverse readership in many different communities, and our relationship with those who read the publications we produce is very significant to us. Throughout every part of the publishing process we are constantly considering the relevance to readers of each sentence, each paragraph, each article. Throughout formal review processes as well as during every interview, we are asking ourselves: 'What aspect of this story / this article is relevant to those whom we know are interested in narrative practice?' In this way, the readers of our publications are with us every step of the process.

## Key principles

In trying to create a forum of the written word for community conversations, various key principles have proved helpful. These principles have been developed in constant conversation with narrative therapists and we are very interested in how narrative ideas can influence publishing. We are also interested in how the following publishing principles might be of relevance to practitioners.

We've briefly described here ten principles – each one could really warrant a much lengthier discussion.

### 1. *Opening space for conversations*

We aim to publish writings which open space for conversation. The emphasis is on the sharing of story rather than polemics or statements of fact. We hope with each publication to engage readers' own thoughtfulness and to contribute to discussions within the field.

### 2. *The person / community is not the problem*

We aim to publish writings which are consistent with the principle that the 'person is not the problem, the problem is the problem'. In other words, we publish papers which are written from a non-pathologising stance and that are broadly congruent with the ideas of narrative therapy.

### 3. *Care with the politics of representation*

We want people to have a chance to represent their own experience in the writings rather than authors representing the experiences of others. At the very least this means that, wherever appropriate, anyone referred to in the writings has a chance to read and reflect on the ways in which they have been represented. We also aim to take care with the politics of representation in relation to issues of gender, class, race, sexual preference, culture, ability and age.

### 4. *Direct relevance to practitioners*

We aim for our publications to offer writings of direct relevance to practitioners. We prioritise descriptions of hopeful and helpful work which will provide practical ideas to those working in the field.

5. *Seeking new authors*

As much as is possible, we are always seeking to publish a significant amount of work from new authors, those who have not published their work before. Many good practitioners don't have a sense that they could write up their work for publication, and we see it as part of our role to offer support, encouragement and collaboration. We are particularly interested in generating opportunities for young authors and authors from perspectives/communities/cultures whose work and ideas are generally under-represented in the written word.

6. *Collective processes of review to forecast possible effects of each paper*

Publishing is a collective process. Prior to publication, each piece is read by a significant number of people: to try to forecast the possible effects of the paper on a range of different readers; to check accuracy; to receive feedback on how it could be improved; to address issues relating to the politics of representation; and so on. This is always invigorating. There is a sense of anticipation that is associated with receiving this initial feedback prior to the publication because people's responses are impossible to predict. What is often most interesting are the differences in response depending upon the cultural background, gender, class, sexuality of the reader. We wish to encourage practitioners to write about their work and so try to make their experience of submitting their work a good one. Developing a constructive formal review process for the *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* has been a key part of this<sup>5</sup>. Importantly, these collective processes of review also generate connections between practitioners, further enriching relationships within a community of ideas.

7. *Expanding the thinking and parameters of narrative practice*

Another principle involves publishing new work which expands our thinking and the parameters of narrative practice. We do not want to be simply confirming what is already familiar. Sometimes manuscripts are sent to us that introduce new therapeutic practices and ways of thinking about therapy and/or community work. We are particularly fortunate that various narrative practitioners, including Michael

White and David Epston, seem to regularly develop sparkling new ways of working! As publishers this is a treat. At other times, one person's dedication to a particular topic breaks new ground. This was particularly true in relation to the special issue of the Dulwich Centre Newsletter on sexual abuse by priests, therapists and other professionals. Ann Epston (1993) was committed to raising this issue in professional networks before many others were discussing it.

We also put significant effort into researching and seeking out challenging perspectives from outside the field which will contribute to invigorating narrative practice. In recent years, the work of Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad on bi-gender, transgender perspectives (2001), and the work of America Bracho on community work approaches (2000) have significantly influenced discussions in the field through the publication of their work and their presentations at conferences. Publishing interviews with leaders of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Boraine 1998), with Joan Nestle about her work with the Lesbian Herstory Archives (2003), with Noam Chomsky (1995), and others, has had the effect of stretching our thinking and inviting new conversations. Similar challenges have also come from publishing the work of various community groups<sup>6</sup>. A considerable percentage of the papers we publish are not written from the standpoint of 'professional knowledge' but instead contain the stories, perspectives, and ideas of those who have sought counselling, or are involved in community organising. These perspectives from 'outside' the professional realm make a significant contribution to refreshing and re-conceptualising therapeutic practice.

#### 8. *The effects of the process of publishing*

Many narrative therapists are interested in the significant effects that documentation can have within a therapeutic process. While the publications we create are by no means primarily 'therapeutic', we try to make the process of publication a rewarding one for



authors. This is most relevant when we are documenting the stories and insider knowledges of individuals and groups who have experienced significant trauma and/or abuse. It is our experience that when care is taken around these processes, documents can be created which richly describe the skills and knowledges of the particular individual or group and that offer a great deal to therapists and community workers, while simultaneously contributing to a further reduction in the effects of trauma or abuse in the lives of the author(s) (see WOVSAFE 2002, Silent Too Long 2000, Cecily 1998).

#### 9. *Archiving history*

While our primary focus remains on looking ahead and the development of new ideas, practices and conversations, we are aware that the written word also serves as a key forum for the documentation of history. The field of narrative therapy and community work is relatively young and yet it is developing very quickly. In differing ways, our publications seek to document the history of this field. Perhaps the most obvious example of archiving history was the creation of the book: *Family Therapy: Exploring the field's past, present and possible futures* (Denborough 2001). We recognised that some younger practitioners who are vitally interested in narrative practice were not necessarily aware of how these ideas were linked to various family therapy traditions. We are interested in documenting the history of therapeutic and community work ideas and practices in ways that assist practitioners.

#### 10. *Responding to social issues*

Finally, we also use the written word as a way to respond to current social issues. This is a significant part of our work and so we have dedicated the next chapter to discussing it!

### **Stories and histories behind each principle**

Each of these principles has developed over time and in response to various dilemmas. For instance, in the early years of family therapy, some

therapists were becoming aware of how diminished people could feel if they were talked about at conferences or described in the written word in ways that did not fit for them. In contrast, when people had a chance to represent themselves on paper they would often feel a sense of exhilaration and pride.

Fifteen years ago, Cheryl White and Amanda Kamsler (1990) published 'An open invitation to formulate policies around publishing'. This piece invited practitioners to become involved in conversations about publishing, particularly in relation to matters of representation:

*We believe questions are being asked about the way writers have represented the experience of people whose lives and stories they are describing. Where people's actions are under discussion in the literature without their permission – no matter who they are and what is being said – these people are at the mercy of the writer's descriptions about their behaviour ... As a result of these considerations, there is now a greater importance being placed on the accurate representation of people's experience in articles and presentations. A number of Australian and New Zealand papers are now being co-authored by the therapist and the persons with whom they met in therapy. There has been a move away from the practice of writers discussing clinical examples as if their own perspective was the 'correct' one. There has been a greater respect for the perspectives of family members in descriptions of the process of therapy ... In relation to these issues, we would be interested to have readers' responses to the following questions:*

- *What guidelines would be appropriate for writers of case studies in describing the actions of people involved in therapy?*
- *To what degree is it appropriate that people being described in case studies have their perspective represented?*
- *To what degree is it appropriate that such persons participate in the writing up of the story of the therapy?*
- *When the actions of other professional persons are described in the case study, to what extent should their permission be sought? Should their perspective be represented? If so, in what way?*
- *If papers are of a more personal nature, relating to the author's own experience of life, what guidelines might be appropriate to observe when describing the actions of parents, family and friendship networks? (p.23)*

Fifteen years later, conversations about these issues are continuing and the invitation is still open! We would be delighted to hear from readers with their thoughts on these questions or on any of the principles described above. These ten principles contribute to editorial decisions and discussions with authors. They also assist us to explain to ourselves, and to others, why we do what we do.

### **Working with practitioners – traversing mediums**

It is always with a sense of anticipation that we open envelopes that look as if they will contain new manuscripts. Similarly, when an article arrives by email, it is a real pleasure to print the first copy and sit down to read it, before sending it to reviewers. These are some of the delights of publishing!

There are, however, many other ways in which papers are developed. Many practitioners who would like to write up their work, simply do not have the time to do so. Many of those who do have the time, may never imagine writing an article for publication. They may doubt the value of what they have to offer, or they may simply find the spoken word a far easier medium than the written. This is really hardly surprising as therapists have chosen a profession in which the primary medium is talking!

Acknowledging the very different specific skills and practices which are involved in the spoken word and the written word, makes the work of publishing considerably more meaningful. Once it is acknowledged that these are very different realms, and that people will have different relationships and differing degrees of ease in relation to them, it becomes a key responsibility as publishers to find ways to traverse the mediums of speaking and writing, to assist practitioners to tell the stories of their work.

There are many ways in which this occurs. Our submission guidelines are relatively informal and flexible in relation to formal grammar, style, and punctuation regulations; we invite drafts of articles to be sent to us so that collaborative editing processes can then take place; and we offer handy hints to prospective authors who may have ‘writers’ block’.

## Handy hints

In our training programs, and at any other opportunity, we try to encourage practitioners to document their work in the written word. For those who are not accustomed to writing, or who find this a difficult process, we offer these handy hints:

- Often people have negative experiences of evaluation in relation to the written word. To act as an antidote we suggest that you identify who you think would be a supportive audience to the story of your work that you are wishing to tell. This might be a particular colleague, a friend, or a family member. For your first draft, picture yourself telling the story of your work to this person. The main thing is to get the first draft onto the page!
- If the writing is still difficult, try to think through what forms of the written word you are most comfortable with. Often people are familiar and comfortable with writing letters (or these days emails!). If this is the case for you, then perhaps you could begin your writing process as a letter. Address it to whoever is the supportive audience you are writing to (e.g. Dear ...) and then tell the story of your work.
- Think about which particular story you wish to tell. Picture a beginning, middle and end; establish who are the key characters; and identify the story's particular theme or plot. Orientating your writing in this way may make a difference.
- Start with the part of the story which means the most to you, which you are most interested in sharing with others.
- If the writing continues to be a challenge, it might be worth doing some more preparation in the spoken word. Perhaps you could dictate the story you wish to tell into a tape recorder and then transcribe this. This means you will then have words on a page which can then be edited into shape.
- Some people find that company really assists in the process. Having a friend or colleague ask you some key questions and recording this informal interview on tape, and then transcribing it, may also be helpful.

If you are reading these handy hints for the first time, and if you have occasionally thought that one day you might write up a story of your work, we'd like to take this opportunity to encourage you. Go for it! We look forward to hearing from you.

### **Collective processes**

Over the last few years we have also developed a collective process of creating papers which has been both connecting and energising. This approach involves sending out a series of questions to a range of practitioners and asking for responses and stories from their practices on these particular themes. When these responses are then sent back to us they are compiled and edited into a 'Questions and Answers' paper with the contributions of all those who participated in the process acknowledged. This process was used to create the book: *Narrative therapy: Answers to your questions* (Russell & Carey 2004), and it enabled a range of practitioners, who may otherwise not have been in a position to publish their ideas and examples of their work, to contribute their ideas in print. From an editorial perspective, these processes are time-consuming and demanding. Nonetheless, we think that the results have been really worthwhile.

### **Interviews**

In addition to receiving submissions of articles, some papers we publish begin their life as interviews, as spoken conversations. These conversations may take place in offices, over the phone, in cafes, people's homes, at conferences, even occasionally in cars and shopping malls! Certain narrative therapy principles and practices are helpful in these interviews, but the context is not therapeutic. Instead, the aim of these interviews is to generate rich descriptions of work practices and principles, and rich descriptions of the experiences of those whose lives are at the centre of the work (as opposed to rich descriptions of the identity of the person being interviewed). These interviews are then transcribed and often the questions are edited out so that the end result is the practitioner telling the story of their work in their own words without interruption<sup>7</sup>.

Our Indigenous Australian colleague, Barbara Wingard, has invited us to consider that where interviews take place is sometimes just as important as the questions that are asked:

*We must make it possible for people to be able to tell their stories in ways that are right for them. With Aboriginal people this means thinking through what would be a comfortable place for the conversations. It might mean sitting out on the lawn. It might not be called counselling, but instead just talking together under the trees. Sometimes the environment and the way that people sit together makes it more likely for people to be able to tell their stories.* (Wingard & Lester 2001, p.vi)

It was similar when we visited Carcross in the Yukon, Northern Canada, in order to interview Harold Gatensky (1996), a First Nations' leader involved in developing circle justice initiatives as alternatives to conventional police, court and prison processes. Harold met us at the airport and took us by snowmobile across iced-over lakes for quite a distance. It was only when we had arrived at a traditional meeting place that certain stories were told.

We have also heard from therapists what a difference it can make to consider the aesthetics and meaning of the particular places in which people are invited to share their stories.

## **Taking care and the relationships that follow**

For some individuals and groups, documentation in the past has played a negative role in their lives. Those with significant histories within mental health services, for instance, have often had the stories of their lives represented without their consent and in ways which are inaccurate and hurtful. It is therefore up to us as publishers to take considerable care so that the process of recording people's perspectives on paper is a good experience. When working closely with people who are willing to share tender stories of their lives, significant relationships evolve over time. These are two-way relationships that are significant to us.

## **Travel**

Just as therapists will go to great lengths to seek out alternative stories in the lives of those who consult them, if we hear of hopeful work we will try to do whatever we can to enable it to be documented and shared with others. Usually, those involved in the work will write this up themselves, but sometimes it works best for one of us to travel to wherever

the work is occurring to play an active part in the documentation. At times people comment on how much we travel and how exciting this must be. Despite the long hours, hard work, and considerable jet-lag, it is exciting and continually challenging as we have to question our perspectives on every aspect of life.

In trying to choose a story from our travels to include here, many images spring to mind. Perhaps the most appropriate involves a trip to Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1997. We had travelled to Brazil to write up the work of the 'Minha Rua Minha Casa - My Street My Home'. This is a project organised by the Association of Street People which is not focused on offering services but instead on organising different ways of living. The Minha Rua Minha Casa project aims to be a community space for people living on the streets. We interviewed Walter Varanda (1999) under a freeway in Sao Paulo as we walked amidst people and rows of large metal saucepans which were standing over grills and fires. Twenty people with sharp knives were working away cutting up large numbers of vegetables, while others were sitting on benches reading newspapers. Clippings of news and politics relevant to those who live on the streets were pasted as always on a large notice board and there was an atmosphere of busyness, collective work and thoughtfulness. The whole space was clean and ordered. Plants had been placed in painted red concrete pots, and circular windows looked out into the cityscape. In the one room that had been completed at that time, a group was discussing the pros and cons of alcohol use. The sounds of cars and horns were a constant companion to our conversation as hundreds and hundreds of cars passed directly overhead every few minutes. A man came up to inform us that he was the person who wrote down the names of the volunteers. Every role was being conducted by homeless people. This project is concerned with mobilising the people on the streets to work collectively to achieve the ways of life that they are interested in, whatever these may be. This work is inspired by the writings of Paulo Friere (1999) and is also philosophically linked to the Movimento dos sem Terra (Landless Movement).

We were so inspired by this work that we decided to try to interview Paulo Friere while we were in Sao Paulo. To our considerable surprise, this was arranged and we were invited to his home. At the time,

Paulo Friere was not in good health, but he welcomed us (Walter Varanda, Cheryl White and David Denborough) to his study. When he discovered, by asking us in perfect English, that we did not speak Portuguese, he began talking to Walter in their native tongue leaving us in silence. His eyes were twinkling throughout and the meaning was clear. Unlike in much of the world, English was not going to be privileged in this house. After a time though, he relented, and began to speak with us in English. He spoke eloquently and with passion about his work in Brazil:

*This seems a time of enormous possibility. Progressive educators of the past have played their part in bringing us to this point ... We still have crucial roles to play. We need to view our work with a sense of perspective and history. Our struggle today does not mean that we will necessarily achieve change, but without our struggle today, perhaps future generations would have to struggle much more. History does not finish with us, it goes beyond.* (Freire 1999, p. 39)

His words seemed particularly meaningful as it turned out this was the last interview Paulo Freire gave before passing away a few days later. His words, and the work of *Minha Rua Minha Casa*, have contributed significantly to many lives.

## **Looking back**

Looking back, a great deal has changed over the last twenty years. Originally, all the publications were written on typewriters and then photocopied. If we had to come in on weekends, everybody would bring their children and their friends who would play in the building, run madly about and photocopy leaves while the adults stuffed the envelopes. Now, however, a mailing house is in charge of subscriptions and the children, who are now nearly thirty, are no longer so interested in leaves!

Technological changes have brought wonderful benefits but there have been some significant hiccups for us along the way. When we first purchased a computer we were very excited to print out all the labels on the database. It was only later that we realised we had sent out the newsletters to everyone who had NOT subscribed, and those that had subscribed received nothing!



More recently, the advent of storing data on CDs has made a difference, although not always in the ways we have imagined. When Jane arrived in Liverpool, UK, for the conference we were co-hosting there she brought with her the CD with the conference database, with all the information about participants. In fact, she brought two copies just to be safe, but they were both blank! While one form of technology had left us on the brink of administrative calamity, fortunately email saved the day. A quick call was made to Jenni Wright back in Adelaide and at one o'clock in her morning she dashed into Dulwich Centre and emailed us the database.

Despite these hiccups, the use of email and more recently Skype (which enables us to speak with people through computers for no cost anywhere in the world!) have further increased the possibilities to link practitioners and to build a community of ideas.

### **Contributing to a community of ideas**

Just as we understand that the written word can enable conversation, and that reading involves connectedness and forms of communion, the process of creating publications is strongly relational. This work involves meeting, talking and building connections with a vast array of people, practitioners and communities.

We see ourselves as linked with those who read the stories we publish. Our hope is that each publication will contain stories that will resonate for particular readers, that the stories and ideas will be shared, and that conversations will continue.

When the cover of any publication is first opened by a reader, we see this as the moment when they are about to be introduced to the author, to the author's ideas, to new stories, and to the lives of those who are described in its pages. Facilitating these introductions, creating the possibilities for the meeting of ideas, is what our work is all about. While we can't guarantee that authors and readers will get on, that they will like each other, we can at least make it possible for them to meet!

## Acknowledgements

It seems appropriate to acknowledge here the current International Advisory Group for the *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* which consists of members from Mexico, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Norway, Ireland, Denmark, Austria, Israel, UK and USA:

Norma Akamatsu, Makungu Akinyela, Elsa Almaas, Tom Andersen, Jennifer Andrews, Chris Beels, Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad, America Bracho, Maggie Carey, Susanna Chamberlain, Gene Combs, Saviona Cramer, Vicki Dickerson, David Epston, Hugh Fox, Jill Freedman, Yael Gershoni, Kenneth V. Hardy, Rachel Hare-Mustin, Ann Hartman, Mark Hayward, Allan Holmgren, Sue Jackson, Alan Jenkins, Maxine Joy, Amanda Kamsler, Zoy Kazan, Dirk Kotzé, Rudi Kronbichler, Joan Laird, Tracey Laszloffy, Bill Lax, Dean Lobovits, Stephen Madigan, Elspeth McAdam, Vanessa Mahmoud, Imelda McCarthy, Alice Morgan, Jonathan Morgan, Margaret Newmark, Marilyn O'Neill, Amaryll Perlesz, Loretta Perry, Claire Ralfs, Amanda Redstone, Colin Riess, Sallyann Roth, Shona Russell, Olga Silverstein, Yvonne Sliep, Jane Speedy, Gaye Stockell, Emily Sued, Kiwi Tamasese, Angela Tsun, Charles Waldegrave, Tangihaere Walker, Kaethe Weingarten, Michael White, Barbara Wingard, John Winslade, Jeff Zimmerman.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Sarah Hughes who has distributed Dulwich Centre Publications in North America for more than ten years. Over this time, the number of links she has made between practitioners, authors, articles and books has been fantastic!