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Developing Training Courses that are Congruent with Narrative Ideas

This week, here at Dulwich Centre there are thirty therapists visiting from different parts of the world as part of our international training course. This training program takes place over the course of a year and involves three distinct two-week teaching blocks. In between these blocks, participants read articles and write reflections, send in tapes of their work, and complete written and oral presentations. As we prepare to welcome participants from Hong Kong, England, USA, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, South Africa and New Zealand, we are reminded that training courses and events are key ways in which a community of ideas is generated, sustained and re-invigorated. There is something particularly energising when a diversity of practitioners are engaging rigorously with ideas and practices and are exploring how these can be put into practice in unique ways in their own cultures or contexts. In fact, we love this!

While in the past we (the authors) have both taught in a range of contexts ranging from universities, prisons, schools and other tertiary education, neither of us work as teachers now. Instead, alongside our roles with Dulwich Centre Publications, we are the co-ordinators of some of the training programs and events here at Dulwich Centre and this is an aspect of our work that we thoroughly enjoy. Our key aim is to provide learning contexts in which participants can develop their skills as therapists and

community workers. We are also aware that many participants also teach narrative therapy ideas in their own contexts.

In our experience, the relationship between therapy and teaching is rich and complex and we are constantly asking ourselves: 'How can we go about developing training courses in narrative therapy that are congruent with these ideas?' In this chapter we will explore some of the ways in which the principles of narrative practice are influencing how these ideas are being taught.

Before we do this we would like to make three quick acknowledgements. Firstly, the ideas in this chapter have been developed in the context of working collectively with the entire Dulwich Centre Faculty: Michael White, Carolyn Markey, Alice Morgan, Maggie Carey, Shona Russell, Sue Mann and more recently Mark Gordon. Developing training programs is a collective project and we are all in this together. Secondly, to Ann Hartman whose encouragement to value the art of teaching has been highly significant to us. And thirdly, to those who participate in the training programs we co-ordinate. Those who seek out this training are often drawn to the metaphor of story, and bring a commitment to non-pathologising practices, as well as a commitment to skill development. What's more, people come to Dulwich Centre for the ideas and practices they can learn rather than for any formal accreditation. This combination, we think, means that we consistently have the pleasure of meeting with thoughtful, dedicated, creative practitioners and this makes our work a real pleasure.

Having made these three acknowledgements, we now wish to return to how the principles of narrative practice are informing the ways in which we structure the courses we co-ordinate. We have been developing the ideas described here since mid-1999. We will particularly focus on the ways in which we structure our 'International Training Program in Narrative Therapy'.

Locating in history and culture the values and commitments that influence therapists' work

One of the key principles of narrative therapy is that skills and knowledges of living are not located internally, inside people's identities, but are instead the products of history and culture (White 2001a; Russell &

Carey 2004). This has very real implications for the teaching of therapists and community workers. What it means is that, when therapists are considering some of the skills and/or values which they wish to demonstrate in their work (i.e. careful listening, compassion, going the extra mile), it is possible to trace the origins of their commitment to these skills in their own lives. Rather than a therapist seeing a particular skill which they possess as theirs and theirs alone, the history of how they came to be drawn to developing this skill can be explored (White 2001b; Gershoni & Cramer 2002; Hayward 2002). In supervision and teaching contexts, trainee therapists may be invited to trace the history of the values and commitments that shape their work as therapists. This links therapists' practices to their own histories and communities, rather than locating them solely in the realm of 'professional' knowledge. Perhaps this commitment to work in a particular way was honed in interactions with those who once consulted the therapist. Perhaps this value was shaped by family experiences, or by a friendship. Perhaps a particular emphasis in their way of working is influenced by the therapists' culture of origin. Narrative ideas imply that the values and commitments that are demonstrated in therapists' work have been shaped by interactions and histories, not only within the professional realm but also within personal, family, friendship and cultural realms. This opens up a range of possibilities for exploration in teaching.

Questioning normalising judgment /
questioning the effects of everything one thinks and does

The fact that narrative therapy is influenced by poststructuralist ideas leads to questioning practices of normalising judgment (White & Epston 1990) and the measurement of people's lives against certain uniform standards. So much about conventional institutional teaching involves the use of rating scales of achievement. It is not only students' lives which are subject to evaluation according to various rating scales – teachers and presenters are often placed in similar circumstances.

Comments from students about the ways in which they can at times judge themselves harshly in relation to where they believe they fit within continuums of achievement, have led us to try to pre-empt this and create a way of talking about it in our courses. It's not as if this means that

normalising judgment suddenly vanishes, but new ways of noticing it and talking about it become possible. Here is an extract from our most recent participant handbook:

> *In training contexts in all fields, sometimes broader educational practices of competition, comparison and rating scales can affect participants' experiences of learning. Participants sometimes say that previous experiences of evaluation and judgment can result in them becoming distracted by comparing themselves with others and worrying about whether they are as 'good' as everybody else. We'd like to invite participants into questioning these continuums of achievement, because what is the marker against which achievement is to be judged? Is it the amount you have learned, the difference in your practice from the beginning of the year to the end? Is it the degree to which you have assisted in creating a good learning context for everyone else? Or the ways in which the ideas have been applied to your work? Or the amount you have read or written? Is it the degree of clarity of your spoken contributions, or their degree of kindness? Is it the degree of skill shown in balancing work, study and family life? Is it the speed of finding your way with the maps of narrative practice, or the degree of enjoyment taken in getting hopelessly lost? Is it the amount of delight experienced in sharing the ideas with another? Or the amount of tears saved in working with one person in a different way? We hope that together – faculty and participants – we will find ways to encourage discernment and rigorous learning, without participants placing themselves or others into continuums of achievement.*

Questioning practices of normalising judgment, and the measurement of participants' work against uniform standards is only one part of the process. The flipside is to encourage a determination to question the real effects of everything one thinks and does as a practitioner. These are quite distinct approaches. We hope that participants in our courses will generate skills in discerning the differing effects of certain ways of approaching therapeutic conversations. We also hope that they will become increasingly open to rigorous and direct feedback (both from those consulting them and from peers and teachers) about their work. We hope they will step into an ethic of critique that involves a continual questioning of the real effects of their practice on the lives of others.

It is perhaps more straightforward to put these considerations into practice in training contexts in which participation is the only criteria considered. This is true for many courses at Dulwich Centre. In our international program, however, those participants who seek the Graduate Diploma in Narrative Therapy (rather than a certificate of attendance) are required to demonstrate the use of the maps of narrative practice in particular ways in their end of year written and oral presentations. We are transparent that there are two reasons why we do this: firstly because it has led to a significant improvement in the quality of these presentations; and secondly, because we have received feedback from participants that this gives a different meaning and value to their participation in the program.

Significantly, as co-ordinators of the training, we step into an ethic of critique ourselves. There are a range of ways in which we consistently seek feedback about the real effects that every aspect of the training program is having on participants' learning. Some of this occurs in informal ways, as we speak with participants before the day starts, during breaks and at lunch times to regularly get a sense of their experience. We also establish a more formal process of feedback. During the first teaching block, every participant meets with a designated faculty member to talk through how things are going and to hear any suggestions they may have. In fact, this process begins prior to the course. Initial phone interviews begin a process of building a relationship with participants that includes the giving and receiving of feedback. These interviews include discussions about people's preferred ways of giving and receiving feedback, and as a faculty we try to adapt to this. We are determined that participants are able to speak with us about their experience of every aspect of the program so that we can continually question why we are organising the teaching program in particular ways.

Engaging with a narrative metaphor for training[1]

Since the development of the narrative metaphor in therapy, this metaphor has been translated into the teaching of therapists in a number of ways (see White 1992; Kazan et al 1993; Winslade et al 2000). One of the possibilities that arise from a narrative metaphor in training, is to

explore with students their stories of becoming therapists (White 1992; Hartman 2002, Winslade 2002). In this way, the teaching context can involve the authoring and re-authoring of identities as 'therapists'. Unique outcomes in people's practices can be identified and more richly described. Outsider-witness practices and definitional ceremonies can often form a key part of this narrative training (see Kazan et al 1993; Gershoni & Cramer 2002). It is also possible to encourage participants in training courses to invite people (e.g. family members, friends, colleagues) to act as witnesses to their learning in some way throughout the particular training course, and we have seen what a difference this can make.

Using a narrative metaphor in teaching also offers an alternative way of conceptualising the relationship of teaching and learning. This relates to an acknowledgement of the collaborative and unpredictably creative ways in which any attempt to 'copy' is always linked to the generation of something new, as Michael White describes:

It is not the participant's attempt to copy and the teacher/ supervisor's encouragement for her/him to do so that is problematic. Of necessity, for any such endeavour there is always a starting point – a point of entry – and this is always with a 'copy'. However, complications do arise if teachers/supervisors and participants believe that it is possible for participants to succeed in their attempts to copy, and if they believe that this is being achieved. This belief will blind participants and teachers/supervisors to what the participants are originating in their own work, and how they are doing this. Thus, paradoxically, participants are most likely to experience success when they are faced with unique outcomes in their work that are enabling families, and acknowledge the failure of their attempts to copy – when they experience, first hand, the phenomena that Geertz … finds 'surprisingly reassuring: it is the copying that originates …'. (1992, p.85)

One of the key tasks of any training course is to try to enable participants to think critically and in questioning ways. This conception of learning brings with it new challenges. It then becomes relevant to ask to what extent particular training/supervision contexts:

- *allow for and invite the incorporation of and facilitate the expression of aspects of the participants' lived experience?*
- *recruit the participants' imagination?*
- *encourage participants to identify what they are originating in their attempts to copy?*
- *enable participants to grasp the ways that they are taking over the story about therapy and making it their own?*
- *assist participants to explore the real effects of the performance of this story in their life as a therapist?* (White 1992, p.85)

Considering and de-centering the stories of participants' own lives

Within a teaching context, it seems significant to honour and engage with the personal experiences and stories of participants. One way of doing so has already been mentioned: that is in relation to acknowledging the histories of the values which they wish to demonstrate in their work. However, the personal stories of participants are not centred in a teaching context, but balanced with other considerations relating to other students, teachers and, crucially, those people who will one day consult the trainee therapists (see Sessions 2002). Notions of de-centred practice (White 1997) seem relevant here. They offer a way of conceptualising the importance of including participant experience within training, without this being given priority over other considerations. Various narrative practices, for instance outsider-witness practices (see White 2000), can be used within teaching contexts to provide opportunities for participants to acknowledge, engage with and speak about their own experiences of life within a framework that continues to centre the experience of those who consult therapists. We are very interested in how training programs can consider, and at the same time de-centre, the stories of participants' own lives.

Acknowledging multiple responsibilities and accountabilities

There are multiple complex accountabilities involved in all training contexts. As a faculty we consider ourselves accountable to students in relation to their learning experiences (e.g. acknowledging the significant investment participants make to attend these courses,

developing transparent processes, quality of teaching, offering what was advertised, taking care with learning context, etc.). At the same time, we are also accountable to those people who one day may consult the students we are currently teaching and this involves a different set of responsibilities (giving feedback, challenging/questioning pathologising practices, engaging participants in considerations of ethical practice, encouraging participants to be as good as they can be, questioning professional privilege, etc.). Simultaneously, we also feel an acute sense of responsibility/accountability in relation to issues of gender, culture, class, heterosexual dominance, disability and other relations of privilege and marginalisation. Over time, we have developed a range of relationships with consultants on these and other issues. These multiple responsibilities are complex, and yet invigorating.

Using documentation in teaching

There are a number of ways in which we are currently engaging with the written word in training contexts. Just as therapeutic documents and letters have proven to be of great significance within the therapy domain, the written word can be used to greatly enhance teaching contexts. Here are just some of the ways in which we currently engage the written word in our training courses:

Prior to a course beginning we invite participants to document their hopes and expectations for the course, any obstacles that they can foresee that may impede their learning experience, and any ideas they have that might contribute to overcoming these obstacles. These hopes and expectations are then referred to throughout the course. Throughout the year, we try to prioritise participants' hopes for their learning. These hopes significantly influence the choices that participants make in relation to the areas they focus on for their written and oral presentations. To some extent, participants' hopes and expectations also shape the content of what is taught in the teaching blocks.

Prior to a course beginning, the faculty documents in a participant handbook a wide range of information that may be helpful. This includes archived knowledge from participants in previous courses, as well as practical details of course requirements, resolution processes, etc. This

participant handbook represents the faculty's hopes and expectations. Extracts from our current handbook are included later in this chapter.

Recently, we have begun to invite students to document their preferred way of raising complex issues (e.g. if they feel another participant is talking too much, or if there is some issue of gender, class, culture, sexuality that is making them feel uncomfortable), and also how they would most prefer us to relay any feedback to them about their participation in the course. These too can be referred back to at any time.

The writing of regular short reflections has now become a central part of our training courses. This involves students writing regular reflections on articles from a structured reading list. These reflections are shaped by the principles of outsider-witness responses. Participants note any aspects of the article which particularly resonated for them, explain why, and then acknowledge what difference this might make in their work. These short reflections are then shared amongst participants (either via email or a webpage) and play a significant part in creating a learning community[2]. Faculty members are involved in offering further reflections on these pieces of writing, and in this way a structure of telling and re-telling occurs through the written word during the course.

When participants send in tapes of their interviews, we ask that they also transcribe a section of these conversations and write a brief description of some of the key dilemmas, challenges and enjoyments that were a part of the consultation. We have found that this process of translating the consultation from the spoken word to the written word can be almost as generative a learning experience as the supervision session that then follows.

We have also tried to develop more collaborative processes in relation to participants' end of year written and oral projects. These projects focus on an area of work chosen by each participant. They provide participants with an opportunity to thoroughly explore the use of narrative ideas in their own ways, in their own contexts. As mentioned earlier, for those participants who wish to achieve the Graduate Diploma in Narrative Therapy, these projects need to demonstrate the application of various narrative maps in therapeutic conversations. Recently, we have found that it has been helpful to offer participants the chance to hand in a draft of their

assignment prior to the due date (we now have two dates – one for the draft and one for the final write up). Participants receive significant feedback on this draft, which assists them to work out what further work is necessary prior to when the final write-up is due. This process involves considerably more work for participants and faculty members, but we are pleased with what this makes possible. While an element of assessment still takes place, this structure reduces any sense of isolation and enhances collaboration.

Finally, at times during training programs we create an edition of *Course News*. This is a news-sheet that we can produce overnight and distribute to participants the next morning. Because participants have often travelled a long way to attend the training, and because the teaching time is therefore very highly valued, we explore ways in which we can keep any interruptions to the teaching at a minimum. We often use *Course News* to convey practical information, and we also use it to respond to questions that participants may have raised about certain aspects of the teaching.

Emphasising discernment and a diversity of ways to practice

Within these training courses we wish to emphasise that there is a great diversity of ways in which participants can engage with narrative practices in their own contexts. At the same time, especially early on, we try to assist participants to be able to discern between structuralist and non-structuralist assumptions (see Thomas 2004) and ways of approaching conversations. We have found that being transparent about this is very helpful. Here is an extract from an edition of Course News:

There are many different narrative practices, and engaging with these in one's own context is a creative process. Over time people find their own ways to do this and develop unique styles influenced by their particular histories, thoughts, hopes, etc. Early on, one of the key tasks of this training course is to assist participants in becoming able to discern between structuralist and non-structuralist ways of thinking and approaching conversations. We see this as one of the responsibilities of the training. If people have paid for training in narrative ideas then we see it as our job to assist them to learn what sorts of practices are congruent with a narrative approach, and those that are based in different philosophies. This is not to say that narrative practices are better than

other approaches. It is simply that this is what participants have paid to be taught in this course. The reason that we teach these ideas is that they fit for us.

Therefore, one important part of early training courses involves creating a context for participants to develop skills in discernment, as it is this discernment that can then lead to creative explorations down the track. This is very different to learning that there is one correct way to engage with narrative ideas. Quite simply, there isn't one correct way. The ways in which people engage and change and re-make narrative practices are limitless, and the creativity of this process is exciting.

The dilemma for us as a faculty, is how we can create an optimum context for participants in training courses to learn skills of discernment (especially when throughout popular psychology and therapy, structuralist ideas are so taken-for-granted), while avoiding any thought that there is only 'one way' to engage with narrative practices.

We'd love to hear your ideas about how this sort of context can be co-created between participants and faculty members in training contexts.

Introducing maps of practice

Michael White has introduced the metaphor of various 'maps of therapeutic practice', and over the last few years, teaching about these maps has become a key aspect of the courses at Dulwich Centre. In fact, we now see it as a responsibility of the faculty to convey and teach the various maps of narrative practice, and to provide opportunities for people to practise using them. We're really interested in richly describing the metaphors of map-making, map-reading and the exploration of landscapes and territories of life. At times in training courses we have articulated some of the assumptions we hold about maps:

- Maps do not tell someone which way they are required to travel; instead, they provide tools by which people can find their way (by any myriad of routes).
- Maps are a way of understanding, describing and conveying to others a particular territory (in the case of therapy, territories of conversation and territories of identity).
- A map does not relate the truth about the landscape, it is one representation.

- More than one map can be used to describe or explore the same territory, as each map with its different scale and guide marks makes different things possible.
- Maps are not fixed in time.
- Many people, when using maps, add their own markings, make their own changes to maps so that they become more personally relevant.
- Following post-structuralist tradition, the making of maps also contributes to the shaping of landscapes of conversation and identity.
- The more familiar people become with map-reading and application, the easier it is to fully explore landscapes of conversation and identity.
- Alternatively, once one is familiar with a map and how to use it (or once one is familiar with a particular landscape), it becomes possible to tuck the map away in one's back pocket and only pull it out when one is lost.
- Once one has become familiar with maps, it becomes possible to create one's own.
- The use of maps in teaching therapy is also associated with a small 'p' political commitment to not locate the 'success' of therapy sessions in the individual therapist, but instead to be transparent about the processes and thinking that informs the therapy session.

Poststructuralist understandings of power within teaching

Just as poststructuralist understandings shape narrative practice, they are also helpful in understanding the task of teaching. The work of poststructuralist feminist educators has been of considerable assistance in thinking through 'the power of teaching'. Various feminist writers have drawn links between recognising students' experience and knowledge and the feminist ethic of linking the personal and the political. Poststructuralist feminist writers (Gore 1992, 1998, 2002; Luke & Gore 1992; Ellsworth 1989) have also tried to articulate how developing 'critical or radical pedagogies' involves much more than simply enabling students to speak in their own voice, or even 'empowering' students. Influenced by the writing

of Michel Foucault, Jennifer Gore, an Australian feminist educator, is attempting to move away from understanding power in the classroom as something that is only a negative or repressive force, to instead focus on the real effects (good, bad and indifferent) of teacher *and* student authority in the classroom:

> *An implication of this [poststructuralist] analysis for the ongoing development of radical pedagogies then, is that rather than attempting to develop specific pedagogical techniques which somehow minimise power in the classroom, it would be helpful to focus on how whatever techniques are used are invested with power relations. For instance, with any specific pedagogical practice or set of practices, questions to be asked include: What kinds of norms are established? What kinds of classifications are made? And with what consequences for particular students or particular groups of students?* (1998, p.284) [And we would add here: with what consequences for the future recipients of therapy, and with what consequences for teachers?]

Poststructuralist educators are also paying attention to practices of power of both students and teachers, and understanding that these practices of power are not simply positive or negative but that they are creative, and that they have real effects which can be acknowledged in teaching contexts. These considerations invite us as course co-ordinators to continually reflect upon the practices of power that we are deliberately enacting in our role as co-ordinators, and in the ways in which the training program is structured. We try to describe these practices, and the reasons for them, and to be as transparent about this as possible.

So far in this chapter we have explored a range of ways in which the principles of narrative practice are influencing the ways in which these ideas are being taught. These have included:

- Locating in history and culture the values and commitments that influence therapists' work.
- Questioning normalising judgment/questioning the effects of everything one thinks and does.
- Engaging with a narrative metaphor for training.
- Considering and de-centering the stories of participants' own lives.
- Acknowledging multiple responsibilities and accountabilities.
- Using documentation in teaching.

- Emphasising discernment and a diversity of ways to practice.
- Introducing maps of practice.
- Poststructuralist understandings of power within teaching.

There are a number of other principles that also influence the training courses that we co-ordinate. While these are perhaps less directly related to narrative ideas, they are nonetheless influential in shaping training programs.

Expectations of rigor and skill development

From the very first interaction with applicants to these courses, we are clear that we will be having significant expectations in relation to rigor and skill development. Participants have often invested considerable time and resources into travelling long distances to attend these training courses, and so we feel a responsibility to take the development of these skills seriously and to prioritise learning. Since we have adopted this approach, we have noticed a marked improvement in the quality of work that has been presented. We've included here a relevant extract from the Participant Handbook:

One of the aims for the written project is that it be of a quality that can be submitted to a professional journal, but it's important to note that there are a great diversity of writing styles for different journals … One of the aims for the oral presentation is for it to be of a quality that could be given at a professional conference. As with published work, there is a great diversity of presenting styles at different conferences! We don't want the experience to be intimidating, but on the other hand we do wish to stretch participants.

Thinking and practice

Learning narrative therapy and community work involves developing skills in a range of practices. It also involves understanding the poststructuralist thinking that informs these practices. To learn only the skills in questioning, without appreciating the thinking that informs them, would leave a practitioner with only a very thin understanding of this way of working. Alternatively, to learn only the thinking without a focus on skill

development would leave a practitioner very vulnerable in their work with others. Therefore these programs aim to thoroughly examine the poststructuralist ideas that inform narrative therapy and community work, as well as provide opportunities to rigorously practise the skills involved in this work.

Considering the experience of learning and providing many learning methods

As mentioned earlier, we try to prioritise participants' hopes for their learning and also to adapt the content of the course (where possible) to cover areas of skill development that relate to participants' work. This means that participants' aims for skill development and learning are sought out and responded to and we try to stay in touch with participants' experience of learning throughout the training experience. At the same time, these training programs offer a wide range of different learning methods: from didactic teaching, to the sharing of videos of practice, to discussions, small group exercises, role-plays, reading, writing reflections, creating a more substantial written paper, delivering an oral presentation, as well as opportunities to send in tape recordings of examples of therapeutic practice (along with a transcript of the tape and a short commentary on their experience of the session) and to receive feedback on this. Knowing that different people learn in varied ways, we hope these different methods provide scope for many ways of engaging with the ideas and developing skills.

Inclusive and acknowledging context

Within all the training programs and events that we organise, we wish for all participants to have the opportunity to make significant contributions and for these contributions to be acknowledged. Now that more of our programs involve participants from different countries and cultures, this inclusivity includes ensuring that there is room for the articulation and demonstration of differing cultural ways of being and ways of learning. There are a range of ways in which we emphasise this. Firstly, the structure of the program involves participants engaging with the ideas and constantly referring back to how these are used and practised in their own context and in their own ways. We are genuinely excited to learn about

how people adapt ideas in their own cultural context and in no way assume there can be an immediate translation. Secondly, early on in various welcoming events, participants are encouraged to share songs / dances / stories of significance from their local cultures. These songs are performed in people's first languages and a context is created for the sharing of cultural stories and histories. Thirdly, participants from certain country groupings or cultural backgrounds often come together in small groups to explore in detail the differing cultural meanings of certain ways of working. In turn, these small groups feed back their perspectives to the entire group.

Enabling community connections rather than prioritising the creation of a 'group identity'

Within the training courses we co-ordinate, we are strongly committed to enabling participants to have opportunities to connect with each other. Differences in relation to gender, culture, religion, sexuality and language often lead to vibrant conversations, and participants are generally vitally interested in the work that others are doing. We foster these connections in a range of ways: through welcome events, social evenings with music and song from all countries represented, small group exercises during the teaching, and occasional study groups. In addition, everyone is away from home and so participants often share evening meals and social activities on weekends. We take considerable care so that no participant feels isolated in the learning context. These aspects of course co-ordination involve   building a sense of community and facilitating community connections.

This is distinct from promoting the creation of a 'group identity'. The principles that underpin some forms of group work place a high priority on creating a sense of group cohesion, group bonding, and group identity. We do not try to encourage the creation of a close-knit collective identity for the entire training group. In fact, in our experience, certain expectations of 'group identity' can inadvertently lead to valuing relationships (either between participants, or between faculty and participants) *over* differences, including cultural differences. Prioritising the creation of a 'group identity' can also inadvertently centre the training program in people's lives and separate participants from their own local

context, friendships and colleagues. This is an area we are thinking more about. We are interested in how the training programs we co-ordinate can enable participants to learn from and with each other, and make the most of vibrant differences of perspective, while also enabling participants to remain connected back to their own local context and their regular colleagues.

Inviting practitioners to address issues of privilege and dominance

Over the past few decades, the extent of past abuses of power by therapists, social workers and health workers has been brought to light. Our privilege is being questioned and challenged by those most affected by it. In Australia, perhaps the most powerful example relates to the complicity of the 'helping professions' in the Stolen Generation, in which Aboriginal children were forcibly separated from their families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997), but there are also other examples in relation to white privilege, heterosexual dominance, and issues of economic injustice. The histories of our field are being revised and our own actions questioned, and it's impossible to know how future generations will view our efforts to come to terms with both the historical legacies of our field of work and our own acts of privilege. These matters offer us considerable cause for reflection. How does one teach a questioning of professional privilege?

Teaching about the history of one's own profession, in particular its complicity with past events, is one possibility. Sharing stories of our own inadvertent participation in unfair circumstances and creating opportunities for teachers and students alike to discuss the privilege with which one is bestowed, are other steps that can be taken (see Mann 2000). A further consideration relates to how to invite therapists into rigorous self-examination of their work. To begin to seriously address the professional privilege which shapes our lives and actions will inevitably require us to be able to hear and respond to acts of outrage from those most adversely affected by the ways we express this privilege. Being able to listen and respond to the outrage of those who are marginalised without experiencing this outrage as an affront or a personal wounding, seems a minimum

requirement to begin a process of trying to build meaningful partnerships across great differences. We mention this here because we believe it is the responsibility of those of us involved in training health professionals to prepare them for such circumstances, and to talk with participants in training courses about what might assist them to be able to address issues of professional privilege. We are also interested in how to structure course content and pedagogy in ways that contribute to professional identities that are open to hearing direct feedback about the real effects of one's work on the lives of others.

One of our key challenges involves how best to engage participants in discussions about matters of privilege and dominance (see Akamatsu 2002). At times we have found this to be really difficult and as a result have created a project specifically on this topic. We have published on the Dulwich Centre website (www.dulwichcentre.com.au) a range of exercises designed specifically to invite consideration and conversation about these issues. This is a continuing project and we would really welcome hearing your perspectives, ideas and experiences in this realm.

Extracts from the Participant Handbook

As course co-ordinators, we first put together a participant handbook prior to our inaugural International Training Program in 2002. Many of the themes we included were a result of feedback from participants about earlier courses. When a complex matter arises in a training course, particularly if some aspect has gone off track, we meet with the relevant participants and various other faculty members to try to make sense of what is occurring and to work out what the issues are. We then try to write a short piece that can be included in future handbooks. In some ways, therefore, these 'participant handbooks' document what we have learnt over time, and each year there is more to add! So much so, that perhaps one day we may need to get them formally bound! At the same time, these participant handbooks are also a form of transparent practice. They enable participants to read and understand, in advance, the thinking that informs the training programs we co-ordinate. This has been well-received.

We have included here some of the key themes from the Participant Handbook for our current international course.

Self-care during the teaching blocks

The focus of the training program is in enabling participants to increase their knowledge and skills in relation to narrative practice and so matters related to participants' own lives will only rarely become the focus of discussion. Having said this, throughout the training course, conversations and consultations will take place that are powerfully moving. Topics will be discussed which may powerfully resonate with aspects of your own life experiences or the lives of people you care about. This is an expected part of the training. While moving resonances no doubt also occur in your regular work, and there are probably a range of skills of self-care that you engage in during these times, you will be away from home during the training blocks and so we would like to invite you to take care of yourself in relation to this aspect of the course. There may be times when calling home, writing an email or letter, taking time off to walk around the nearby parklands, or de-briefing with another participant in the course, may become relevant.

As faculty members, if we see that someone has been powerfully affected by a particular teaching session or discussion, we may or may not approach the person and ask how they are going, as in our experience it can sometimes be respectful to grant participants the time to gather themselves together without needing to talk with a faculty member about this. We would like to invite participants into practices of self-care in relation to this, and also to invite participants to take care of one another. Some groups have liked to formalise this in terms of establishing a 'buddy' or 'de-brief' system, while others have preferred a less structured care-taking. We will leave this to the participants to arrange.

We also strongly encourage participants to take a morning or afternoon off if you feel that you are getting a little over-loaded. We see it as our job to provide enough content of value in the two week training blocks (and we err on the side of more content rather than less!) and we see it as participants' responsibility to be able to determine when it would be good to take some time off. The other piece of advice offered by past participants' of training programs is to try to make sure that you get enough sleep!

Understandings of group 'dynamics' / group 'process'

In past training programs some participants have expected that we as a faculty will prioritise matters of group 'dynamics' or group 'process'. While we certainly believe we have a responsibility to do what we can to provide a creative, thorough, rigorous and respectful learning context, our understanding in relation to these responsibilities may be quite different to those advocated by some theories of group work. As this is an international training program, and all participants have considerable experience of life and of work, we will be 'pitching' this course at a relatively high level. This refers not only to an 'intellectual' stretch, but also to an 'emotional' stretch. This is because we believe that working with individuals, families and communities requires a high degree of self-reflection and considerable rigour. As mentioned earlier, we will be assuming that participants will be able to take good care of themselves and to ask for our assistance if it is needed.

Care in relation to how we speak about each other

In our experience, over the years there has been a transformation in ways of speaking about 'clients' or those who consult therapists. What was once standard professional speech is now seen as disrespectful and has been and continues to be questioned and challenged. This has occurred to such a degree within the narrative therapy field that it is now relatively unusual within the training courses that we hold here for the faculty to need to respond directly to the ways 'clients' are spoken about. However, within training courses, it seems to still be relatively common for practitioners to engage in less respectful ways of speaking about peers, colleagues, other health professionals and even other course participants. It seems this can be accentuated when there are differences in relation to culture, class, ability, religion, sexuality and politics. Sometimes less respectful ways of speaking might occur outside the structured teaching sessions, or sometimes they might occur within teaching sessions. We hope that everyone involved in the training program will take good care in relation to how we speak about each other.

Thinking about experiences of inclusion & exclusion

For many different reasons, sometimes participants in training courses can be affected by a sense of whether they feel 'included' or 'excluded' by the group. There are a number of steps that we as a faculty have taken so that all participants experience a sense of welcome and inclusion. These have included the emails that we have sent in the lead up to the course, encouraging two or more people to attend the course from each country, offering ways for participants who feel less confident to send in a preliminary tape and writings, offering the extra two-day 'catch-up' workshop prior to the course beginning, having Dulwich Centre as an open house for the few days prior to the course beginning, organising the welcome lunch, and arranging catch-up meetings with small groups of participants during the teaching block. We also see the creation of this handbook as an act of care in relation to these matters.

As participants will all be a long way away from home, it would be quite possible for people to feel a little lonely at times. So, we'd love to invite participants into also taking some care with one another in relation to this. Participants in previous courses have come up with some ideas to assist with this: "We found it very helpful to think through our responsibilities to each other as participants. One idea we came up with was that we felt it was our responsibility to reach out and have a personal conversation with every other participant in the first week of the training block. After this, we then felt it was okay for people to find their own preferred connections and to begin to build friendships, while always having an awareness of other participants' experiences."

As a faculty, we are thoughtful about the fact that some faculty members have existing and, in some circumstances, long-term connections with some participants in this particular training course. No preferential treatment will be given to these participants in relation to any formal aspect of the course. These existing relationships will, however, be honoured outside of formal course hours.

Differences of experience

Inevitably, throughout the year there will be occasions when issues of class, culture, gender, religion, sexuality and / or race, and people's different understandings and experiences of these, will become the focus for conversations. How we raise these issues, respond to them and talk about them is perhaps one of the greatest challenges in any work or training setting. At the same time, finding ways of respectfully addressing and talking about these issues seems to offer an enormous opportunity for learning. We hope to generate a context of curiosity and openness to make this possible. We invite all participants to think through what they believe would contribute to this.

Structuring in time for collective care-taking

One of the things that we value in the training program is that during the teaching blocks, some time is set aside each week to address any collective course matters that require attention. These may relate to practical administrative matters or to considerations of content. These sessions will also provide us as a faculty with the opportunity to consult you and all the other participants on particular matters of current relevance to the course and to the broader field. We see these times as an integral part of collective care-taking.

Feminist-informed training context

It is relevant to mention that all work that takes place at Dulwich Centre is informed by feminist perspectives. This relates to the therapy, publications, community work and also the training that takes place here. We hope to invite all practitioners into considerations of the operations of power and privilege, including operations of gender, in all contexts of life but especially in therapy and community work practice. We also hope that other operations of power and privilege, including matters of culture, race, class, sexual identity, ability, remain a focus of our collective attention throughout the training program.

Talking about sexual and gender identity
> *This training course seeks to consider and celebrate a diversity of sexual and gender identities. The program has been shaped by the perspectives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and bi-gender practitioners.*

Inviting an audience to your learning
> *We believe that it will really assist your experience of the course to invite an audience to your learning. This may involve making an arrangement with another member of the course to share your reflections to each reading, it might involve sharing your thinking about your project with your work colleagues, it may even involve friends or family in some way. We strongly recommend that you think about who would be willing to be an audience to your learning throughout the coming year.*

Within the handbook we also describe the competencies which need to be demonstrated in the written and oral projects; the requirements that need to be fulfilled in order to successfully complete the course; processes for feedback; careful and thorough grievance procedures; the reading list; and a range of other practical information.

Continuing conversations

To assist in thinking through all these issues, and many others related to teaching and training, we rely on the thoughtfulness of a range of consultants both here in Australia and overseas. Some of these are practitioners, such as Mary Pekin, Manja Visschedijk and Mim Weber, who have graduated from previous courses that we have held. We are also in close contact with consultants from the countries of origin of participants and also consultants on a range of issues such as gender, race, sexuality and class[3]. Many of the ideas described in this chapter have evolved from the conversations we have shared together, and there's no doubt that these ideas will continue to change and develop!

There are always plenty of things to talk about with our consultants. For instance, one of the current issues we are discussing involves how we can

take care not to blur the distinctions between therapy conversations, teaching discussions, and other everyday forms of interaction. We have found during some training contexts (usually those in which participants are engaged in exercises which involve them interviewing one another) that participants may begin to start asking 'therapeutic questions' in everyday interactions - during lunch times, after hours, and so on, either with other participants or with staff members in the building. We think this is potentially fraught and are interested in examining how care can be taken in the teaching context so that the distinctions between these different contexts of life remain clear.

Another matter we are currently considering is how to best structure a context which will facilitate the development of the next generation of teachers of narrative ideas and practice. We are interested in assisting younger practitioners to become teachers as we are sure it will lead to considerable learning for all of us.

Closing remarks

We began writing this paper while thirty therapists were visiting Dulwich Centre from different parts of the world as part of our international training course. They have long since returned home! But we will meet up again soon in Hong Kong.

This has been a complex chapter to write because there seems to be so much to say! There are many other aspects of a co-ordinators' role in training programs that we could have written about here, including liaison with teachers, developing reading lists, and aspects that are commonly referred to as 'quality assurance' (formal feedback, grievance procedures, etc.). While these are all significant matters to us, they will need to wait for another time. What's more, this chapter has been written from our perspective as co-ordinators, rather than as teachers, and so we have not touched upon key pedagogical questions such as the micro-practices of teaching that help to scaffold participants' learning, or how to give feedback at times when participants are misunderstanding or misrepresenting narrative ideas that will not be experienced as a criticism of the person[4]. We also could have given more space to conveying what a good time international practitioners have when they come to visit Australia – with surfing, cycling, bushwalks and site-seeing all part of the experience!

What we have focused on instead, are a range of ways in which the principles of narrative practice are influencing how we understand and structure these training programs. For those of you who are participants in narrative training courses or are co-ordinating your own programs, we hope this is helpful! When we started out, we were on an incredibly steep learning curve (and still are!). We would have loved to read anything on this topic and we continue to devour any related articles.

We look forward to continuing to meet with groups of practitioners who are wishing to thoroughly immerse themselves in the ideas and skills associated with narrative practice. Creating contexts for practitioners to generate rich descriptions of their own practice, and to share these with other participants through the written word and through oral presentations, seems to us to be a significant part of sustaining a community of ideas. At the same time, it is thoroughly enjoyable to meet terrific people and hear about the great work they are doing in such varied contexts!

Acknowledgements

DEAR READER