Narrative Therapy and Community Work

Level One
Online
5-day Intensive

on
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with
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Adelaide, Australia
Workshop Outline

**Monday**
- Acknowledgements and Introductions
- The Ideas that shape Narrative Practice
- Externalising Conversations

**Tuesday**
- Externalising Conversations: Statement of Position Map No.1
- Therapeutic Posture
- Re-authoring Conversations

**Wednesday**
- Collective Narrative Practice
- Tree of Life

**Thursday**
- Re-authoring Conversations: Dual Landscapes
- Re-membering Conversations

**Friday**
- Narrative Documentation
- Definitional Ceremonies
- Outsider-Witness Practices
- Bringing the practices together
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What is Narrative Therapy?

There are many different themes that make up what has come to be known as ‘narrative therapy’, and every therapist engages with these ideas somewhat differently. When you hear someone refer to ‘narrative therapy’ they might be referring to particular ways of understanding people’s identities. Alternatively, they might be referring to certain ways of understanding problems and their effects on people’s lives. They might also be speaking about particular ways of talking with people about their lives and problems they may be experiencing, or particular ways of understanding therapeutic relationships and the ethics or politics of therapy.

Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centres people as the experts in their own lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives.

The term “narrative” implies listening to and telling or re-telling stories about people and the problems in their lives. In the face of serious and sometimes potentially deadly problems, the idea of hearing or telling stories may seem a trivial pursuit. It is hard to believe that conversations can shape new realities. But they do. The bridges of meaning we build with others help healing developments flourish instead of wither and be forgotten. Language can shape events into narratives of hope.

Engaging with the narrative metaphor in the development of therapeutic practice invites us to think about how we can encourage people to do what they routinely do – to place the events of their lives into storylines – but in relation to some of the more neglected events of their lives. This opens possibilities for the further development of therapeutic practices that are more de-centring of the therapist and centring of the meaning-making skills of the people who consult us. This has been one of the biggest attractions for me about the narrative metaphor.

Notes:
2. From [http://www.narrativeapproaches.com/tensecintro.htm](http://www.narrativeapproaches.com/tensecintro.htm)
Telling our stories in ways that make us stronger

As Indigenous people of this country, our stories are precious. They have survived over generations. Our elderly have passed them onto us and we will continue to pass them onto our children. We have our own ways of telling and listening to stories which are important to us.

When we come into contact with mainstream health services, either as client or workers, sometimes we find very different ways of talking about people’s lives. We find a focus on aims and objectives, or on projects which involve easily measured outcomes. Often these ways of speaking about people’s lives do not fit comfortably for us (nor for many other people).

The telling of stories however is something we can relate to. As Aboriginal people, we have always told stories about our lives, and we know how important it is for people to be connected to their own stories, the stories of their family, their people, their history. These stories are sources of pride. When people become disconnected from them, life can be much harder to live.

Our people understand the significance of our stories, and the importance of taking care to tell them in the right places, to the right people and in the appropriate ways. Once these stories begin to be told we can listen for the moments of change, the times when people are moving their lives in positive directions.

As Indigenous Australians we’re going to keep telling our stories in ways that make us stronger.¹

Note:
Maps of Narrative Practice¹: Why might we use them?

To quote Michael White:

On occasion, in teaching contexts, I have been asked why it is necessary to have maps for therapeutic practice. My response: ‘it is not at all necessary’. However ... we all refer to guiding ideas of some sort in the development of therapeutic conversations, although very often guiding ideas have become so taken for granted and accepted that they are rendered invisible and unavailable to critical reflection. I believe that this is a hazardous development, for it has the potential to restrict us to the unquestioned reproduction of what is familiar in terms of therapeutic practice, regardless of the consequences on the lives of the people who consult us.

1. For guidance on our journeys with people who consult us about the predicaments and problems of their lives.

2. To assist us in finding our way to destinations that could not have been specified ahead of the journey, via routes that could not have been predetermined.

3. As a reference for accountability: to render more transparent the therapeutic process that Michael White has developed.

4. Therapeutic conversations are not ordered, and I make no effort to determine my response to people’s expressions ahead of these expressions.

5. A map gives a structure that can guide practice. Interestingly, it is rigorous practice and repetition of this non-linear structure that enables spontaneity—the expressions of life that seem most spontaneous to us are those that we have had the most practice in.

Note:
How to Externalise the Problem linguistically: Some ideas about the linguistic descriptions of problems

1. Listen for what may be pushing the person around. For example:
   - ‘I feel really guilty about it’ … How is the guilt getting in the way of what you want?
   - He’s always been a lot of trouble! … How has the trouble got in the way of the connection you’d prefer with your son?

2. The externalised name of the problem may change. It is an evolving conversation. If a number of problems are being mentioned, maybe ask the person to clarify which would be most important to speak about in the time that you have.

3. Externalising is an understanding of identity that linguistically has us changing a verb or adjective (doing or describing word) into a noun – a thing. For example:
   - depressed / the depression
   - fighting / the fights
   - hopeless / sense of hopelessness
   - worry / the worries

Often we will hear people using more descriptive or ‘experience-near’ names for the concern: ‘the black cloud of depression’, ‘the fidget bug’. It is important that we adopt this language and centre their knowledge about the problem.

4. Initially the problem may be called ‘it’ or ‘the problem’. There is often more than one problem.

5. Externalising practices when used meticulously and carefully enable people to separate their identity from the problem and have a sense of being able to act in relation to the problem. This can also mean people can join together against the problem – rather than see the person as the problem.

Note:
1. This handout was originally compiled by Carolyn Markey and Chris Dolman (2009).
Metaphors used in resisting the problem

All metaphors that are taken up in the development of externalising conversations are borrowed from particular discourses that invoke specific understandings of life and identity. These discourses influence the actions people take to solve their problems, and they are shaping of life in a general sense as well. The diversity in these metaphors is very much due to the fact that most of them were coined by people who have sought therapy.

- Walking out on the problem (from the concept of agency)
- Going on a strike against the problem (from the idea of civil action)
- Setting themselves apart from the problem (from the concepts of separation and individuation)
- Defying the problem’s requirements (from the idea of resistance)
- Disempowering the problem (from the idea of empowerment)
- Educating the problem (from the concept of teaching)
- Recovering or reclaiming the territory of their life from the problem (from geographical conceptions of life)
- Undermining the problem (from geographical conceptions of life)
- Reducing the influence of the problem (from the concept of personal agency)
- Coming out of the shadows cast by the problem (from the idea of light)
- Reducing the problem’s grip on their lives (from the psychological conception of life)
- Taking their lives out of the hands of the problem (from puppetry)
- Resigning from the problem’s service (from the concept of employment)
- Taming the problem (from the concept of training)
- Harnessing the problem (from the equine world)

Note:
Personal Agency

This is a sense of self that is associated with the perception that one is able to have some effect on the shape of one’s own life; a sense that one is able to intervene in one’s own life as an agent of what one gives value to and as an agent of one’s own intentions, and a sense that the world is at least minimally responsive to the fact of one’s own existence ... The restoration and/or development of this sense of personal agency provides an antidote to the sort of highly disabling conclusions about one’s identity that feature perceptions that one is a passive recipient of life’s forces.¹

... the experience of personal agency and the capacity for responsible action are founded upon a special form of social collaboration. This is a social collaboration that assists people to traverse the space between what is known and familiar to them, and what might be possible for them to know about their lives and identities.²

In contrast to internal state conceptions, intentional state conceptions of identity are distinguished by the notion of ‘personal agency’. This notion casts people as active mediators and negotiators of life’s meanings and predicaments, both individually and in collaboration with others. It also casts people as the originators of many of the preferred developments of their own lives: People are living out their lives according to intentions that they embrace in the pursuit of what they give value to in life; they are going about the business of actively shaping their existence in their effort to achieve sought-after goals.³

Notes:
Re-membering Conversations:
Some History

In the mid to late 1980s Michael White began to write about some of his conversations with people who had been referred to him on account of what was called a ‘delayed grief reaction’ or ‘pathological mourning’.

Often these people had received therapeutic treatment based on the ‘saying goodbye’ metaphor, that is, the requirement to accept their loss and proceed with their life detached from the deceased loved one.

People therefore experienced not only the loss of a loved one, but in this requirement to ‘say goodbye’ and move on’, people also experienced a loss of self and identity. Michael White became interested in conversations that were re-incorporating the person’s relationship of the lost loved one into their life, rather than a further forfeiture of the relationship.

These ideas and practices were first published in: White, M. (1988), Saying hullo again: The incorporation of the lost relationship in the resolution of grief. *Dulwich Centre Newsletter*, (2), 17-55.

It was also during the mid-1980s that David Epston introduced Michael White to the work of the American cultural anthropologist, Barbara Myerhoff. It was on account of this reading that he began to refer to these conversations as ‘re-membering conversations’.

Barbara Myerhoff wrote about her work with an elderly Jewish community in Venice, Los Angeles. These people had migrated from Europe to the United States as children and infants in the early twentieth century, ultimately retiring to California. They had not only experienced the loss of family during the Holocaust, but many had also outlived their own children or were within rare contact with them. These things, as well as poverty, inadequate housing and transportation, and gentrification of the area around them, contributed to them being, as a group, both isolated and invisibilised.

The centre of their social life was a senior citizen’s centre, and what Myerhoff called ‘Definitional Ceremonies’, forums that are purposefully created to provide an opportunity for the performance and re-performance, to an audience and to themselves, of their preferred identity claims. The implication of others in these claims was called ‘re-membering’ by Myerhoff.

Notes:
Re-membering Conversations: Some additional questions

Figure’s contribution to Person’s life
• In what ways was ______ supportive of you?
• What is it that makes this support significant to you?
• Are there particular ideas or activities you enjoyed sharing or doing together?
• What was this like for you to be sharing these things with _____?
• What did you experience when you were with this person?
• What was it that ______ contributed to your life during those times?
• Were there other things that ______ brought to your life?

Person’s identity through the Figure’s eyes
• What do you think ______ appreciated about you that had him/her supporting you in these ways?
• What do you think ______ appreciated about you during these times?
• What did this tell ______ about you or tell them about what is important to you?

Person’s contribution to Figure’s life
• In what ways did you respond to this support?
• Might there have been particular things that you did to take in or receive his/her support?
• In what ways might ______ have known you were responding to his/her support?
• What might this have been like for ______, to know they were contributing to you in this way?
• What might this have meant to ______?
• What do you think might have made possible for ______ through knowing you?
• What do you think this might have brought to their life?

Implications of this for Figure’s identity
• In what ways might you have made a difference to how ______ thought about themselves or saw themselves?
• What might your response have confirmed to ______ about what is important to them?

Note:
1. This handout was originally compiled by Chris Dolman (2010).
Therapeutic Documentation

... the words in a letter don’t fade and disappear the way conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalising it. A client can hold a letter in hand, reading and re-reading it days, months and years after the session. I have had clients tell me that they regularly re-read letters I sent them years ago to remind themselves what they endured, how far they had advanced their lives, and the extent to which they considered themselves to have changed.

As well as letters recording what has happened in a session, other important uses of documents include:

• To record particular knowledges that a person needs to have available to them at times of crisis, whether these knowledges are knowledges of particular skills or knowledges of preferred identities;
• To spread the news of preferred stories to others in the person’s family or community;
• To contribute to the rite of passage accompanying the end of work together.

What distinguishes a narrative letter is that it is literary rather than diagnostic; it tells a story rather than being expository or explicatory. The letter engages the reader not so much by developing an argument to a logical conclusion as by inquiring what might happen next. Structured to tell the alternative story that is emerging along with therapy, it documents history, current developments, and future prospects.

Notes:
Maps of Narrative Practice: an overview

Failure conversations
Externalising conversations
Responding to Trauma
Re-Authoring conversations
Scaffolding distance questions
Re-membering conversations
Definitional
Absent but implicit
Ceremony &
practices
Outsider-witness
practices

Note:
1. This handout was developed by Carolyn Markey and Shona Russell (2007).
Some tips for engaging with Narrative Therapy training exercises

*Keep in mind the intention is to create a context for the multiple stories that shape our life, relationships, identity (hopes/values/commitments/intentions) and work.*

**Interviewer:**

- Spirit of curiosity and the naïve enquirer;
- Avoid assumptions by asking questions that invite the person to undertake their own meaning making;
- Avoid advice giving and offering examples from your own life/work, you’ll have your turn to be asked the questions (even though it is likely that you hear things in the person’s story that resonate personally!);
- Keep checking in that the pace, questions and conversation is okay for the person;
- Try to take note of key words and phrases that the person has said, use the person’s own language for each question.

**Interviewee:**

- Avoid being a passive recipient of questions – let the person know if a question feels like too much of a stretch, is uncomfortable or you don’t wish to answer the question;
- Take your time and try to stay connected to the question being asked;
- Keep in mind that the questions are structured to scaffold the conversation but not in a linear fashion, if one question is tricky or doesn’t connect it’s a good idea to move to the next one and see what unfolds …

**Narrative note-taking**

- It is not necessary to write everything down as it can take your energy away from the conversation and relationship that you are engaged in;
- Use the person’s words and phrases in their own local and personal way of speaking, trying not to analyse or put your own ideas/words over the top;
- Take note of which words and phrases speak to the problem story and which ones speak to alternative stories of life, relationship and identity (hopes, values, intentions, commitments);
- Take note of emerging themes and ideas to reflect them back to the person to offer opportunities for ‘thickening’ or gathering richer descriptions.

**Note:**

This handout was developed by Poh Lin Lee (2015).

*These training notes and exercises have been influenced by the work of Michael White and David Epston, and have been developed to enable practitioners to advance their skills in narrative therapy.*
# Counselling Notes

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## Effects

- OK / not Ok / both?
- Why?

- What’s important - values, beliefs, hopes
Some Key Ideas that shape Narrative Practice

Stories of healing

‘As indigenous Australians we’re going to keep telling our stories in ways that make us stronger’. (Aunty Barb Wingard, Kaurna Elder, 2001).

Injustice, trauma and relations of power

Many people we work with in the helping professions have histories of being subjected to multiple injustices, which are invariably linked to broader social issues. For many, these injustices take the form of interpersonal violence, gendered violence, and other injustices based on gender, class, culture, religion, age, sexuality, ability.

How do we respond to the effects of historical and ongoing injustices in people’s lives? As receivers of stories of social suffering, what are our responsibilities? How do we ensure our conversations are just, with people who have faced so much injustice and unfairness?

Two commitments

‘Of the many purposes that have shaped my explorations of therapeutic practices over the years, two are particularly relevant. One of these has to do with the imperative that I have placed on the development of therapeutic practices that decentre the voice of the therapist…that have the effect of bringing to the centre of the therapeutic endeavour some of the knowledges of life and skills of living of the people who consult therapists.

Another purpose that has been particularly relevant to my engagement with the narrative metaphor has been shaped by a commitment to deriving practices that are non-normative…in the sense that they do not, in an unquestioned and automatic way, simply reinforce and reproduce the valued forms of mainstream culture.’ (Michael White, 2011)

People have skills and know-how

People have skills and know-how, generated in the history of their lives and found in their families and communities, that can become relevant for addressing their current predicaments. These skills and knowledges are present in the everyday stories of people’s lives. Through the re-telling of stories, people re-familiarise themselves with these skills and knowledges, and their values, hopes and intentions for their lives.
Some Key Ideas that shape Narrative Practice continued...

**Stories shape life**

People are meaning-makers – we go through life actively ascribing to meanings to the experiences of our lives. The stories we carry with us through our lives – about ourselves, our relationships, other people, our communities – provide a frame or lens through which we interpret the events of our lives. These stories are influential, they do not just reflect life, they shape life. They influence our memory, our perceptions, our feelings, thoughts and actions.

**Life is multi-storied**

Commonly people present with problem-focused, deficit accounts of their lives. People feel trapped in one-dimensional lives. However, life is multi-storied, not single storied. There are many dimensions to people’s lives, and there are many stories unfolding at the same time. Some stories are more dominant than others, and people’s lives are also full of events that go un-storied. When subordinated stories become more richly known to the person, further meaning-making occurs and other conclusions about life and identity become apparent, and other possibilities for action become available.

**Stories exist in a broader context**

The stories people tell about their lives do not exist in a vacuum, they are shaped by ‘cultural stories’ or discourses, which make possible different versions of events. So whenever people engage in meaning-making, they are drawing on cultural discourses. Narrative practice is interested in exposing discourses that are problematic for a person, so that they can be evaluated and space for alternatives can be created.

**Identity is social and relational**

A person’s identity is not fixed nor internal but it is a social achievement, created in relationships with others. It is relational, distributed, performed, and fluid. People’s actions are shaped by their intentions, values, hopes, principles, in contrast to naturalistic accounts of identity.

**Rich Story Development**

Narrative practice seeks to acknowledge the problem stories of people’s lives – what they are concerned about and contending with in their lives and how these are affecting them and others. It also seeks to bring forward the alternative stories of people’s lives – their responses to what they have been through, and other stories of life that are more in line with their preferred sense of identity. These can also shape life!
Some Key Ideas that shape Narrative Practice continued…

**Connections with Others**

Narrative practice seeks to provide opportunities for people to be linked to others through sharing skills and know-how and contributing to others lives, and through themes around what is important in their lives. It’s also about finding audiences to people’s preferred stories.

**Practitioner Positioning**

Narrative practice endeavours to focus on the person’s circumstances, concerns and what they might be hoping for; offer conversations that are interesting and generative of the person’s curiosity about their own life; emphasises the person’s own skills, knowledges, meanings & experiences; collaborative; accountable to the person’s feedback about the conversations; hopeful and useful.

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**Note:**

This handout was developed by Chris Dolman (2020)
Exercise: ‘How stories shape us’¹

Topic of the Interview

Please think of a pleasing story about you that has been told a few times – a story that others have told about you that you have liked. This might be a story about a particular skill you have, or some personal quality you express in your life, or what other people appreciate about you in your communities, family or work places.

1. Can you tell me a bit about the story you’ve chosen?
2. Do you remember when this story got started? What were some of the events that contributed to ......................... (this story) taking shape and being told?
3. Can you say something about the people who had a sense of this or had a part in telling or talking about this story? Who were they, how did you know them?
4. What has it been like for you to have ......................... told about you? How has it maybe added to your life?
5. Would you say this story fits or not, or a bit of both, with how you may see yourself at times?
6. Has this ......................... been ongoing or is it less influential than it once was?
7. Does the story reflect at all, things that are important to you more generally or things that you hold dear in life or not?
8. Are there particular places/people this would be more known to than other people or places?
9. Do you have any ideas about the direction you would like this story to take in the future?

After two interviews, discuss the following

• In focussing on one storyline, what did it have you thinking about other ideas or stories that could be told about yourself?
• How did the questions reflect the narrative understanding that a story is made up of a number of events connected over time according to a theme or plot?
• How do these questions relate to the idea that stories not only ‘reflect’ life but ‘shape’ life?

Note:

1. This exercise was originally developed by the Narrative Teaching Partnership (Adelaide, South Australia 2006): Shona Russell, Carolyn Markey, Sue Mann, Maggie Carey and Alice Morgan. Revised 2019

These training notes and exercises have been influenced by the work of Michael White and David Epston, and have been developed to enable practitioners to advance their skills in narrative therapy.
Exercise: Externalising Conversations

Asking about the concern
(Statement of Position Map no.1)

Think of something that is slightly problematic for you in your work or life.

Interviewee to briefly describe the problem to interviewer. Please ask the following questions to interweave the person’s words to the questions.

Category One: Naming the problem

*Negotiating an experience-near and particular description of the problem*

1. I’m interested to understand a bit more about when these concerns started. Can I ask you some questions about this?
2. What was going on around you at the time the problem started?
3. Can you think of particular circumstances that may have influenced the concerns you are having now?
4. Are there particular things that are happening when it occurs?
5. Does the problem arise more often when you’re with particular people?
6. Is this problem more present in particular places or situations?
7. How long have these concerns been around?
8. Some people say it helps to find a name to refer to this problem, what name fits or how might you characterise it?
9. In describing [this problem], what mental image or picture might come to mind?

Category Two: Exploring the Effects of the problem

*... on various aspects of the person’s life and relationships*

10. Is it okay if I ask you some questions about the ways [this problem] has impacted on your life?
11. How does [this problem] affect the daily tasks that are important to you?
12. In what ways does [this problem] affect your relationships with those around you?
13. How does [this problem] affect how you think about yourself or see yourself?
14. In what ways does it affect how you treat yourself?
15. Does it affect how you feel physically in any way?
16. What do you notice about how [this problem] gets in the way of what you are wanting in life? OR

17. How does [this problem] affect the hopes and plans you have for your life?

**Category Three: Evaluating the Effects of the problem**

*Inviting the person to take a position in relation to the problem*

18. What do you think about the effects [this problem] is having on your life?

19. Is this okay with you or not okay, or a bit of both, that [this problem] is affecting you in these ways?

20. So where do you stand on how [this problem] is affecting your life?

**Category Four: Justifying the Evaluation**

*Enabling people to begin to speak about their values, beliefs, hopes, dreams, principles, purposes*

21. Why is this okay/not okay for you?

22. Why do you feel this way about how [this problem] is affecting you?

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**Note:**

1. This exercise was originally developed by the Narrative Teaching Partnership (Adelaide, South Australia 2006): Shona Russell, Carolyn Markey, Sue Mann, Maggie Carey and Alice Morgan
Exercise: Re-Authoring Conversations
Describing a story about a new skill, richly

The person being interviewed is to think about and describe a new skill in their work or life that they are pleased about. Try to think of a fairly recent event. This may be trying something new for the first time or something else you have done that is significant to you. Please choose an event you are happy to talk about and explore.

1. Please begin by describing what it is you are pleased about.
2. Can you tell me some more about this?
3. Where were you when this happened?
4. What were some of the things that you did to get ready for this?
5. Were others involved and were they important in the steps you took?
6. Can you describe in more detail what you actually did?
7. Can you remember what was important to you about doing ............... at the time?
8. When you think about these things that are important to you ....................., is there a word or phrase that would capture what it is you’ve been describing?
9. Do you think these things say something about values that are important to you?
10. Thinking back, can you think of other times in your life when this has been important to you?
11. Could you please tell me more about this event in the past?
12. What is it like to make this connection between this event in the past and now?
13. What might it be like for you, if you were to keep connected to these values formed in the past?
14. What might it make more possible?
15. What might other people notice if you were to continue to take steps in the direction you have described?

Note:
1. This exercise was originally developed by the Narrative Teaching Partnership (Adelaide, South Australia 2006): Shona Russell, Carolyn Markey, Sue Mann, Maggie Carey and Alice Morgan.
Exercise: Re-Authoring Conversations Reducing the influence of a Problem

Take a moment to think about a problem you are facing in your work.

1. Can you think of a time recently where you might have resisted or made an attempt to reduce the influence of the problem in your work and life?

2. What was happening at the time? Who was there? Can you describe the place?

3. What did you do? What did you say? What did you think? What did you try?

4. Was there a particular idea, knowledge or skill that you used during this time to resist or reduce the problem’s influence?

5. What would you name this particular initiative, skill or knowledge?

6. Does it have a colour, sensation or something else? How might you describe ……..?

7. What happened in this moment to the influence/presence of the problem? Can you describe it as an image or metaphor?

8. Can you tell a story that would help describe the history of …….. in your life and work? Has ……… been with you for a long time or has it more recently arrived?

9. How do you invite …….. to stand with you in your work?

10. What would others notice when …….. is present in your work? What would they see you doing? What would they hear you saying? What would they notice about the atmosphere or the way you carry yourself?

These training notes and exercises have been influenced by the work of Michael White and David Epston, and have been developed to enable practitioners to advance their skills in narrative therapy.
11. Which individuals, institutions/structures in your context might support or value ..........?

12. Does .......... have allies or other skills and knowledges that it calls upon to support you in resisting/reducing and standing up to the problem?

13. What does this ability to resist/reduce or stand up to the problem speak to what is important to you?

14. Is .......... linked to any particular metaphors, cultural or family practices or legacies that you are a part of?

15. Who might you have learnt .......... from or who might you have learned this with?

16. What difference would it make to the influence of the problem if you were to carry .......... with you? To your work and the lives of others?

17. Do you have any ideas of how you might be able to stay connected with .......... as you move forward in this commitment to resist/reduce or stand up to the problem?

18. How did you experience this conversation? Was there a difference between the conversation about the problem and this conversation? What stands out to you, surprises you or leaves you with some discomfort?

19. Was there a question you wished had been asked of you?

Note:
1. This exercise was originally developed by Poh Lin Lee (2015).
Exercise: Re-Authoring
(Landscape of Identity)

Think of a character trait that you are pleased that you bring to your work.

1. What is this character trait you bring to your work?
2. When you think of [character trait] could you tell me a little more about it?
3. To what purpose have you put [character trait] to?
4. How would you like to make use of [character trait] the future?
5. What might I notice about your work that reflects these traits of yours?
6. What does using your [character trait] in this way say about what is important to you?
7. Why is it important for you to use [character trait] in this way?
8. What are the values that you hold that support you to use [character trait] in this way?
9. How does what you are saying fit with some of what you hopes for your work/life?
10. Who else may not be surprised that you hold these hopes for your work/life? How would they know this about you?
11. What might these hopes for your work/life reflect about what you stand for in your life?
12. What might they say about what you are committed to in your life/work?

Note:
1. This exercise was compiled by Chris Dolman and Carolyn Markey (2009).
Exercise: Re-membering Conversations

Topic of the Re-membering conversation

Think about someone you like and respect who wouldn’t be surprised that you chose the kind of work you are involved in. It might be someone from your early life, a carer, a family member, a grandparent or parent, a teacher or an old friend. This person may not be alive any longer.

The interviewer will use the following questions to facilitate a re-membering conversation around this topic.

1. What might be some of the values or beliefs that you hold that possibly led you to be working in this field?
2. Who would recognise and appreciate some of these values you hold?
3. Can you tell me a bit about this person ... their first name, how you knew/know them, are they still alive, any special things about them, how often do you see them, what might you do with them?
4. How might (person’s name) have come to know these things about you?
5. What were some of the things they might have seen you doing, that would have told them that you hold these beliefs and values?
6. How did knowing that person (name them) possibly influence aspects of your life?
7. Can you think of some things that you do that may have been possibly due to their influence?
8. What do you think it might mean to them to know that you do these things?
9. What do you think it means to them to know you?
10. In what ways do you think you may have contributed to their life?
11. If you were to see yourself now, through that person’s eyes, what might you be pleased about in yourself?
12. Are there times when you have a conversation (real or in your head) with that person? Are there times when you’d want to tell them things?
13. Does their ‘voice’ influence or help or encourage you at any time?
14. What difference might it make to you if you were to think of their influence as you do what you do? What might this make more possible?

Note:

1. This exercise was originally developed by the Narrative Teaching Partnership (Adelaide, South Australia 2006): Shona Russell, Carolyn Markey, Sue Mann, Maggie Carey and Alice Morgan.

These training notes and exercises have been influenced by the work of Michael White and David Epston, and have been developed to enable practitioners to advance their skills in narrative therapy.
Exercise: Re-Authoring & Outsider-Witness Practices

Gather into small groups

Person A: Choose a picture that reflects a value that you hold precious in your work. Take a few minutes to think about a small story or time when this value was with you.

Person B: To interview Person A using the questions below.

Others: Position themselves as outsider witnesses and listen to the story that Person A is telling, taking note of words or phrases that resonate with them.

Person B to interview Person A

1. Could you tell me about the picture you chose, and the value that you would like to speak about today?

2. Could you tell me a story about how [this value] is present in your work?

3. In what other ways do you bring [this value] into your work?

4. Why is it important for you to use [this value] in these ways?

5. Who might notice this about you?

6. What might others experience from you when [this value] is present?

7. What do you think this might be like for them? In what ways might this make a contribution to them?

8. Who, from the history of your life, would not be surprised to hear you speak about [this value]?

9. How would they know this about you?

10. What do you think has supported you to hold onto [this value]?

11. What might [this value] reflect about what you hope for your work/life?
Person B to then interview Others using the four categories of outsider-witness enquiry

1. The expression
   - As you listened to [Person A], what did you hear that stood out for you, or that struck a chord with you, or that you were drawn to?
   - What were the particular words or expressions that caught your attention?

2. The image
   - What did the story suggest to you about what might be important to [Person A], or what they stand for in life?
   - What image did this evoke for you?

3. Resonance
   - You have spoken about what stood out for you in hearing [Person A’s] story. What is it about your own life /work that has you being drawn to these expressions?

4. Transport
   - Where do you think this conversation has taken you?
   - What might be more possible as a result of hearing [Person A’s] story?
   - What aspects of [Person A’s] story would you like to stay with you?

Rotate positions and repeat the process.
Exercise: Looking back, looking forward

Please think of three key learnings / discoveries / possibilities.

Choose one that you would like to speak about. In small groups, take turns interviewing one another using the following questions as a guide:

1. What name would you give this learning / discovery / possibility?
2. Please describe it in more detail.
3. When did it take place?
4. In what way is it was different from what you already knew?
5. Why is it significant to you?
6. What difference might this make in your practice?
7. What difference do you hope it might make to the people who consult you?
8. In what ways does it influence your commitment to your work?
9. What is one next step you might do in taking this up in your journey?

Note:
1. This exercise originally developed by David Denborough (2014).
Reflecting on the training exercises

1. What was it like for the person asking the questions?

2. In what way might they be different from the types of questions you ask currently in your work?

3. What did you notice about the effects of the questions?

4. Did something stand out in particular in the responses you heard to your questions?

5. What was it like to be asked these questions?

6. Did you find the questions moving too fast, too slow or something else?

7. What difficulties did you face in answering the questions?

8. Were there particular questions that sparked your curiosity?

9. What was it like to observe the conversation?

10. What effect do you think this form of curiosity, questioning or co-research might have on the people who consult with you in your context?

11. In what ways might this offer possibilities or ideas in your own context?

12. In what ways might you be able to adapt the questions for your context?

Note:

1. These training notes have been influenced by the work of Michael White and David Epston, and have been developed to enable practitioners to develop their skills in narrative therapy. This exercise developed by Poh Lin Lee (2015).
References / Resources

On-line
Dulwich Centre general site: www.dulwichcentre.com.au
Online courses: www.narrativetherapyonline.com
Free videos on last Friday of every month: http://dulwichcentre.com.au/category/friday-afternoons/
Online bookshop and registration for training events: www.narrativetherapylibrary.com
Searchable bibliography of narrative therapy writings: www.narrativetherapylibrary.com/bibliography
Receive regular news of projects, publications, events by subscribing to Dulwich Centre Emails news: www.dulwichcentre.com.au/email-news.html

Orientation to Narrative Ideas and Practices

Commonly asked questions about narrative approaches to therapy, community work & psychosocial support: A collective paper. Available to read at www.dulwichcentre.com.au/articles

International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work. Published by Dulwich Centre Publications, 4 issues per year. On-line now at www.narrativetherapyonline.com


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Externalising Conversations


These training notes and exercises have been influenced by the work of Michael White and David Epston, and have been developed to enable practitioners to advance their skills in narrative therapy.
Re-authoring Conversations


Re-membering Conversations


**Therapeutic Documents**


**Definitional Ceremonies and Outsider-Witness Practices**


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