**Institute for Narrative Therapy & Community Practice**

E- Learning program 2020-2021

**TITLE**

## Re-authoring conversations – tracing values, skills, and knowledge across time

**Name**

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Katherine is suffering from «panic attack». To get out of the house «brings her a lot of stress so she prefers stay at home all day». Katherine describes herself as an «irresponsible» person «since she was a child». She had always «avoided» to take any responsibility because «if she starts questioning if she would make it she would abandon everything and get locked back home».

Last week, Catherine adapted a cat despite she «knew» that her parents wοuld get «angry» telling her that «it’s a huge commitment» and «she can’t make it» take care of the cat. I found this new situation a good chance to explore the landscape of identity (White, 2007) about this decision since it confronts the idea of her of being «irresponsible». Using landscape of identity questions I asked Katherine «why it was important for her» to adapt this cat. She said that «had been always her **dream,** she and her boyfriend playing and **taking care** (values) of a cat». I asked her «what that probably shows about her». Catherine said that «she had been feeling ready **to do things in the right way** and **offer** (values) a house to a pet».

Thinking that I had, yet, only one fact for the development of an alternative story (Carey & Russell, 2003) I was feeling that it was not the time to ask from Catherine a name for this move . So, I skipped this question and continued my inquiry with some landscape of action questions. Giving her an editorial (White, 2007) of all the values that she had referred to I asked her if she remembers herself doing something like this before. If she remembers a case where she had decided to follow her «dream» about the way she wanted to live, where she wanted «to do things in the right way» and «offer». Catherine, surprisingly quickly, mentioned another memory of her, when she was a student in the university, where she «ignored» her father’s help and preferred to «search on her own» so she could find the laboratory where she would do the job practice.

Passing to the landscape of identity, I asked her «why it was important for her to do it that way». Catherine said that she «wanted to do it by herself», she «didn’t want to feel that she was using her fathers connections» and plus «she didn’t want to compromise with anything less than the best she could get from this experience». Then, I asked her «what that might say about the position she has in life and the values she keeps in her life». Catherine said that maybe that shows that «she wants to live her life as she really wants», «feeling that she can make it without her father’s help». Then, she added that «maybe, when she really wants something she can take the whole responsibility of it». Giving her back an editorial of what she was saying about values, commitments and desires, I asked her what name she would give to that story (landscape of action question). She said that she would call, both, the decision of adapting the cat and the search of the laboratory in university as movements of «freedom».

Next, I continued the landscape of action questions and asked Catherine if she has any other memory where she wanted to do things «in the right way», «without somebody else’s help», «taking the whole responsibility» and «feeling free». Catherine said that when she was in the university her father wasn’t letting her receive and pay any of her bills. He was saying to her that «it was a difficult thing and she wouldn’t make it». There were «many times» where she was trying to convince him that «she would manage to do it». Going back to the landscape of identity, I asked Catherine «why it was important for her» to pay the bills instead of her father. She said that «it wasn’t right» to let her father doing it, and «she had to learn doing these kind of stuff now that she had become an adult». Then, I asked her «what that might show about the way she wanted to live». Catherine said that «she wanted to feel smart and strong taking the responsibility» of her own home and that «she wanted to feel that she lives her own life».

As Catherine was describing this last memory, she said that «she had never reflected about all these facts» as an «effort from her side to reclaim the control and responsibility of her life». Ι found this reflection as an excellent name for her alternative story that has been generated in our session. So, I asked her if the «reclaiming the responsibility of my life» is a good name for this alternative storyline that came up «because of a cat». Catherine said «yes, that is the right name».

Before I apply the technique of re-authoring, I had been very skeptic. I was thinking that it is a very theoretical technique and can’t be applied in a session with Greek clients. My whole practice, so far, had been far more directive. Re-authoring allows the clients free of our prescriptions. That was making me feel worry that the client would start complaining of «abandoning him». Pretty often I feel the pressure of the clients for my own “professional” opinion and it had been hard for me to keep a de-centered role. Plus, I think that greek culture is not, yet, mature for this kind of process. Our culture, because of our educational system, needs always somebody to “know the truth” because he is the expert. So, I was afraid that re-authoring questions would minimize the interest of the client in the session and that he would start avoiding answering them. My experience with Catherine showed me that this technique can bring to the present important facts that can actually change the landscape of identity.

1. White, M. (2007). Maps of narrative practice. New York, NY:W.W.Norton
2. Russell, S. & Carey, M. (2003). Re-authoring: some answers to commonly asked questions. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, (3), 19-43.