Week 3 Reflection – Re-Authoring: Explorations of the absent but implicit: Jill Freedman

I enjoyed this week’s readings as of late I’ve been feeling a little stuck in my learning. I feel like I’ve been beginning to understand the process of Externalisation and the SOP Map around exploring the problem and emerging ideas and understanding around Re-Membering however haven’t grasped Re-Authoring.

I found this reading interesting and it raised many thoughts for me, the idea that what is being discussed is relevant also in relation to what is not being discussed is interesting and for me raised many ideas around the stories we tell ourselves and those we project to others; the bits we choose to share and those we choose to keep. While the article referenced this approach within the context of the Problem story in life I often also find that it can work similarly in the opposite, in that the Problem story/elements are often left out in the matter of many things, Social media being a big proponent of this. This being pertinent with many of the young people I work with in relation to unattainable, unrealistic and harmful images and expectations around body image. This idea of Double listening then becomes an everyday skill and one which we should try and carry with us in all contexts to look for what’s being constructed in all stories.

The article referenced Michael White’s understanding of Trauma as, “pain as testimony and distress as a tribute. He considered ongoing psychological pain in response to trauma as a testimony to the importance of what is held precious and violated. He contrasted these ideas with the notion that psychological pain and emotional distress are the natural outcome of trauma and should be released.” (Freedman, 2012, p.2) While reading this article I had to stop and re-read this paragraph. All of my studies and work have focussed so much on a neurobiological response to trauma as informing so much of behaviour we see in adolescents. White’s notion that trauma is painful through its transgression of what is precious I think is a new idea to me. I instantly had thoughts of many young people I work with who are survivors of Childhood sexual abuse. When we think of these examples so clearly you can witness the destruction of the sense of safety of young people, the sense of love and being held and cared for. I am not entirely sure I understand this notion and how it interacts with my pre-existing understanding of the impacts of trauma. I think probably it works alongside this neurobiological understanding but am interested to read more of White’s work around this. Another example I would think of this early work in Narrative of being challenged, questioning and integrating narrative approaches into my knowledge and practice.

Freedman talks about the entry into the exploration of the Preferred Story. I felt, having read the Russell and Carey article that their approaches differed slightly here. Freedman talks about consciously working from the Landscape of Identity first, before exploring Landscape of Action, she does recognise the traditional narrative approach is to venture towards this conversation with questions around actions taken before Zig-Zagging and scaffolding between the two. I liked the idea that speaking about what you’ve done in the past is more likely to lead to doing more of that in the future, I believe that this can also be applicable for a Problem story and thus highlights the importance of the Preferred story.

Another element of the conversation raised by Freedman that I have been thinking about is the focus on discourses. I think the idea around discourses really highlights the concept of the absent but implicit. For me there are so many discourses’ at play in every moment and context. Though they exist so rarely are they addressed, I feel as though they are often the walls of a house which create rooms and we’re willing to talk about the decorations or colour schemes but not to zoom out to talk about the shape of the room, the design of the house, the idea of a room or house as a construct itself. It is the absent but implicit that defines so much of how we live and are so rarely pointed out that they begin to take on a form of pervasive invisibility.

I had one of these conversations with a young person recently who was recounting the history of her relationship to what we had been calling The Anxiety. She had spoken of its effect of taking away her voice and even as a young child she recalls being unable to speak and always being referred to as Shy when she now can look back and see it was The Anxiety taking rendering her voiceless. Through this conversation we were able to explore the gendered discourse around the portrayal of young girls as shy and how this might differ for boys. We then talked about her position in relation to helping roles in many relationships and the interaction between her in helping roles and being required to use her voice in some contexts but not in others. This worked to highlight the gendered nature of an unhealthy relationship dynamic and she concluded that this was “a different way of thinking about it.” This was highlighted in the article when Freedman discussed a clash between values, (being seen and heard) with a dominant cultural position (Children, Girls, should be seen not heard). We followed this with a conversation about hopes and dreams which for her were encapsulated around the idea of independence, a stark contrast to the role of caring for others that she was often set in.

I found this article was very helpful for both a theoretical understanding and for practical steps to begin to have these Re-Authoring conversations and feel much more equipped to begin to explore how a Unique outcome can slowly, when supported and linked to others, grow into a Preferred Story.