Narrative Therapy: Life Story Work

Session 7
November
22th

Deena Metzger from *Everyday Sacred* by Sue Bende

Stories move in circles;
they don't go in straight lines,
so it helps if you listen in circles.
There are stories inside stories and stories between stories;
and finding your way through them is as easy
and as hard as finding your way home.
And part of the finding is the getting lost.
And when you're lost ,
you start to look around and to listen.

Postmodern Theories

- Narrative Therapy (Michael White and David Epston – Australia and New Zealand (1980)
- Gene Coombs and Jill Freedman – Evanston Family Centre IL.
- Solution focused Therapy (Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, who were influenced by the work of Milton Erickson)
- John McLeod – Narrative Therapy (1997)
- Collaborative Therapy – Harlene Anderson http://www.harleneanderson.org/services.htm
- Diane Gerhart
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yoS3tM_gdE

Narrative Approaches

"The problem is the problem, the person is not the problem."

Michael White and David Epston

"The most powerful therapeutic process I know is to contribute to rich story development."

Michael White

David Epston (1944 -)

Co-director of the Family Therapy Centre Zealand

Michael White (1948 – 2008) Co-director of the Dulwhich Centre in Adelaide, South Australia

White, M., and Epston, D., (1990) *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends.* New York: WW Norton & Company, New York

Origin of Narrative Therapy

- Emerged in the 1970s and 1980s
- Derived from post modern theory
- "White and Epston have been influenced by the postmodern movement within philosophy, anthropology and psychology, and in particular by Michael Foucault" (Carr 2006, 135)

- The focus of narrative therapy is on the relationship between experience and interpretation revealed in the narrative and attention by the therapist should be paid to the way people tell their stories, rather than the accuracy of the account

Goal of Narrative Therpy

- The goal in narrative therapy is to draw out stories that clients have held of themselves that prevent them from moving on – Dominant Discourses.
- To reshape client's perceptions of themselves/identity and their surroundings reshaping or changing their life narratives.

Technique 1: Problem-Saturated Stories

- Refers to the personal stories that individuals express which are based on their experiences
- These stories are characterized by problems
- Clients only think of themselves in terms of these problems
- The therapist needs to utilize listening skills and specific language to draw out the story

Technique 2: Mapping the Problem's Domain

The therapist and client(s) would discuss how the problem has affected various aspects of the client(s) lives

- exploring "reciprocal patterns that become apparent and that are shown to have been supporting the problem" (Williams 2006, 203)
- Scrutinizing the impact that the problem has had on their lives in all respects will serve to be an eye-opening experience
- Ask for a full, detailed account of the effect that the problem has had

Technique 3: Unique Outcomes:

- The client(s) is to identify times in the past when the problem did not exist
  - Helps in assisting the client(s) in creating new personal stories based on those unique occurrences
  - Reminds them that there were times that despite this problem, they were able to overcome it
  - explore alternative possibilities

Technique 4: Externalizing the Problem

This techniques focuses on how the problem impacts a person or family, oppose to how the problem stems from a family.

Name the Problem

- Roth & Epston (1995) state that "externalising establishes a context where people experience themselves as separate from the problem."
- Roth & Epston (1995) find that externalizing "changes a persons' relationship to problems, and shifts the conversation to a focus on the relationship between the person and the problem instead of a focus on a problem-person."

Benefits

- Narrative therapy is particularly useful when dealing with trauma and addictions because:
  - It separates the individual from the disease
- Roth & Epston (1989) states that narrative therapy is useful in addressing trauma and addictions because externalising the problem counteracts the effects of labelling.
- This will aid in no longer seeing the person as the problem, but rather the problem is the problem (Roth & Epston 1995).

- Ability to "move clients from passivity and defeatism towards realizing that they already have some power over the problems that plague them" (Nichols 2009, p. 291)
- Does not place blame
- Separates the problem from the individual
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrTkPGbyRMA

Research

- Predominant Qualitatively
- Present Outcome Research
- (74% reliable improvement) Comparable to other approaches

Conclusion: Narrative Therapy

- People create meaning about their dominant story they create about their life
- Process of separating the person from the problem and the problem from the person.
- Work with clients to create a new story and new meaning within their lives.

Dulwich Centre – Projects and Innovations

Helpful and Intersting Links

Friday Afternoon Session

http://dulwichcentre.com.au/recipes-for-life-by-natale-rudland-wood/

Dulwich Centre -Tree of Life Project

- http://dulwichcentre.com.au/the-tree-of-life/

Healing stories: Partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

- http://dulwichcentre.com.au/healing-stories-partnerships-with-remote-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-communities/

Ted talk Marcela Palonca

- https://reauthoringteaching.com/2010/10/re-creating-narrative-therapy-elsewhere/

White, M., and Epston, D., (1990) *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends.* New York: WW Norton & Company, New York