

# DE-CENTERING PROFESSIONAL POWER AND EXPERTISE : NARRATIVE THERAPY AND RECOVERY

Adam Pickles

Consultant Clinical Psychologist

Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS  
Trust



# Foundations of Narrative Practice

- Life and identity is multi-voiced and multi-storied.
- Language and its use is shaping of our lives.
- Identity is created and re-created in social relationship.
- Therapy conversations can influence the persons consulting and being consulted.
- Problem discourses can be dominant and oppressive.
- Problems and persons can be separated through language.
- ‘The absent but implicit’.



# Foundations of Narrative Practice

- Our ideas, problems, concepts and qualities are products of history and culture.
- Contexts of therapy conversations include wider power relationships in our contemporary cultures.
- The professional disciplines have contributed to the exercise of contemporary power in the lives of people through measurement, norms and the tabulation of lives and the inducement to monitor performance according to these normative ideas.
- Accountability practices are important.



# ‘The Interpretation of Cultures’

- “The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organised into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures.” (Geertz,1973)



# Some Useful Narrative Practices

- Externalising Conversations as an alternative to internal state psychologies (Intentions, Commitments, Purposes, Principles for Living)
- Relative Influence Questions and Relational Language.
- The ‘Club of Life’ metaphor and contributions to identity as a social process.
- Re-membering and the revision of the above and privileging ‘the thick over the thin’.
- Witnessing Practices and Appreciative Testimony.
- Scaffolding Conversations.



# ‘Life History Among The Elderly’

“To signify (a) special type of recollection, the term ‘Remembering’ may be used, calling attention to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one’s life story.’ (Myerhoff, 1982)

# Witnessing and Reflecting Responses.

- A map of practice.
- 1. Identifying the experience.
- 2. Describing the image.
- 3. Embodying the response.
- 4. Acknowledging transport.

(White, 2002)

# Personal Change and Recovery.

- Four themes.
- 1. Hopelessness and issues of control.
- 2. Change process.
- 3. New self versus old self.
- 4. Putting problem into perspective.

(Higginson and Mansell, 2008)

# De-centering : from Despair and Burnout to Hope and Joy.

- “One of the aspects associated with this work that is of central importance to us is the spirit of adventure. We aim to preserve this spirit, and know that if we accomplish this our work will continue to evolve in ways that are enriching to our lives and to the lives of those persons who seek our help.”

(White and Epston, 1992)

