

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Posting from Kerry¹

I loved that at any given time there were multiple threads to choose from. You could choose to join a conversation or simply start your own depending on what you were drawn to at the time. I think this really allowed each person to be engaged in what they were responding to and writing about rather than simply answering a standard set of questions. It also allowed us to dig in more with each other because there was a layer of safety in writing something down and not having to say it face-to-face. We had time to think about what people said and respond in a way that more accurately reflected our thoughts versus what first came to mind.

CREATING A LEARNING COLLABORATORY

The online medium has opened up vast new possibilities for sharing and learning that could be adapted by nearly any teacher, in almost any topic, but seems to be particularly suited for teaching narrative and other postmodern therapies. In fact, when I introduced the online aspect to my teaching, the interactive website became “the tail that wagged the dog.” Rather than just being an interesting and somewhat useful adjunct, it has opened up entire new vistas of possibilities regarding interconnections, learning communities, bringing in multiple voices in addition to the teacher and student, and bridging the gap between teacher and students.

“Collaboratory” blends the two words collaboration and laboratory to convey an environment without walls where participants use computing and communication technologies to connect with a sense of discovery over a shared project. Most commonly, a collaboratory is an experimental and empirical research environment where scientists work and communicate with each other to collaboratively design systems, conduct experiments, and share research findings (Rosenberg, 1991). In this book, I extend the collaboratory metaphor to illustrate how the addition of a website can turn a course into a vital collaborative learning community that combines an ethic of confidentiality with an ethic of circulation (Lobovits, Maisel, & Freeman, 1995). I provide guidelines for online reflections that make it possible for the teacher to take a decentered position, structuring discussion that encourages students to engage with each other in refreshing conversation with emotional intensity more akin to friendship than classmate. This approach to teaching allows space for everyone, including the teacher, to share stories and speak candidly about their learnings and questions.

The Internet is transforming possibilities for education. Colleagues have found enormous potential in teaching web-based courses where all communication takes place online. My personal experience is with constructing blended learning courses that combine face-to-face sessions and technology-based materials to deliver instruction (Bonk, Graham, & Cross, 2005; Heinze & Procter, 2004). While I use an interactive website to augment classroom teaching, I still believe the most powerful learning takes place through direct experience. Through storytelling, guest speakers and recorded interviews, students experience firsthand the spirit of inquiry and shared discovery that guide how I position myself in relation to people who consult with me. Students interact in person and online with people who have been in the client role, and who share stories about their preferences for more personal exchanges with service providers that do not hide behind a “professional” expert position. Together we participate in narrative interviews in which students practice speaking from a place of resonance and transport as outsider witnesses. I devote several chapters later in this book to describe the teaching stories, public practices, and intentional witnessing practices that are a cornerstone of my teaching.

My teaching has changed (and improved, I believe) in significant ways through using the online medium to augment classroom meetings and course readings. In lively classroom sessions, we discuss material, watch videos, practice interviewing, reflecting teamwork and narrative exercises, and meet with guest speakers. While these are all key pieces of the course, meeting online between classes at the course website offers an invigorating milieu for students and teacher to engage in frank and wholehearted conversation about course materials and experiences. This is reflected in their responses; most students overwhelmingly appreciate and express how much they have gained from this “new, improved” model of sharing and learning.

Most teaching guides are so far from students’ actual experiences as to read like instructions in a manual. This book attempts to give readers a real sense of what happens in teaching situations where curiosity, wholeheartedness, and learning infuse the course. Archiving online reflections directly captures what students learn from guest speakers, recorded interviews, and storytelling, excerpts of which I share throughout the book. I provide examples from the classroom and the online class forums of how letters, reflecting teams, and archived websites provide public contexts for people to speak with knowledgeable¹ voices about life-shaping experiences in ways that significantly inform the lives of everyone involved.

Throughout this book, I strive to show how we “re-author” teaching from the concomitant roles of students and teacher. I give personal accounts of how students’ responses energize and inspire me – as teacher, practitioner, author, and fellow traveler in life. I show a behind-the-scenes view of many effects of educational innovations on my thinking, teaching practices, and understandings of students’ experiences. Together, students and I share experiences so memorable that we create what in some cases may well be lifelong bonds. Contacting students for permission to include their voices in this book, I was again reminded of the intensity of our connections, the genuineness of our exchanges, and of our care for

one another. I learn from them; their presence enhances the quality of my life. I do not know if this is common practice. This book shows what is possible.

Rather than surveying multiple approaches, my illustrations are specific to teaching narrative therapy. I made this choice because narrative therapy has had the greatest impact on my own thinking and practices as a family therapist. By giving an overview of some of the most “sparkling” developments in my own evolution as a practitioner (White, 1992), I hope to contribute to students’ commitment to pursue their own enthusiasms through further studies and into their professional careers.

Webs of Connection

I have always been intrigued by how people live and learn in complex webs of connection. I was fortunate to enter the field of family therapy just as a radical change was taking place – from a hierarchical to collaborative style of therapy (Andersen, 1987; Hoffman, 1993; McNamee & Gergen, 1992). My early home-based work with families of infants and toddlers with special developmental needs had ignited a passion for learning directly from and fiercely advocating for families (Bromwich, 1981; Brynelsen & Sax, 1980; Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988). I learned to see community-building as an important aspect of our work – to strengthen social support networks that can include, yet not center on, professionals (Dunst, Trivette, & Cross, 1988; Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, & Zigler, 1987; Schorr, 1997). Later, in my work as an organizational consultant, I was immediately drawn to the growing literature on creating and sustaining collaborative partnerships at work (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998) and building organizations based on a web of inclusion (Helgesen, 1995) I further describe the influence of these life experiences and others in Chapter Three, “Teaching Congruently.”

It should come as no surprise that I seek in my teaching a similar congruence with collaborative ways of working. I take a relational stance in my teaching that strives for cultural curiosity, honors others’ expertise and believes in possibilities and resourcefulness (Madsen, 2007b). I have been gratified to discover teaching colleagues with similar commitments². Together, we have shared teaching ideas, practices, and dilemmas. Often a given exercise or course assignment goes through so many renditions, I lose track of to whom to give attribution. Wherever I have neglected to adequately give credit where credit is due, I hope I will be forgiven.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This book conveys an interactive process in which students and teacher become partners in learning and teaching. My intended audience is teachers and students at the graduate and undergraduate levels, in formal classes spanning the range of social work, counseling and psychology, as well as workshop and seminar leaders teaching in community settings. I believe other programs that train practitioners may also find guidance here. Teachers can draw from my experience in devising their own highly interactive courses. The multiple strategies I use reverberate with

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students, create an engaged learning community, and facilitate new developments in students' thinking, approach to therapy, and even their worldview.

Originally, I envisioned writing this book solely for teachers of narrative therapy. However, I soon realized that my teaching approach applies to a wider readership. Postmodern therapies share an epistemological stance that questions expert knowledge and notions of "truth." The broad umbrella of postmodern critique (Anderson, 1997) includes three different yet overlapping traditions of family therapy: narrative therapy, collaborative language systems, and solution focused therapy. All attend to how knowledge and meaning are constructed in language and through relationship.

BOOK CHAPTERS

I divide the book's fourteen chapters into three sections: 1) Re-authoring Teaching; 2) Multiple Voices; and 3) Practice, Practice, Practice.

Section One: Re-authoring Teaching

In Chapter Two, "Opening the Online Lens," I describe in detail how I design a website for each course with an electronic syllabus providing an in-depth course description, links to online resources and materials on electronic reserve, and forums for discussion. I illustrate how the teacher provides the basic website structure and design, setting the stage for students to become active collaborators in co-authoring and co-editing evolving material. The online medium augments face-to-face classes to create a collaborative learning community facilitated, but not dominated by, the teacher.

Through a course website, students perform, witness, and reflect many times on each others' course assignments. I craft questions to draw forth their insider knowledge (White, 2004a). I strive to create an atmosphere in which no one is the expert and we are all learning together. This however does not, nor should it, deny a mentoring relationship between more and less seasoned practitioners. Often, this means getting out of the way so students can talk amongst themselves. Illustrations demonstrate how online pedagogy can be conducive to the ethics of collaboration and innovative circulation practices that are cornerstones of narrative therapy.

My goal as teacher is to model collaboration, transparency, and respect, and build on students' skills and knowledge. Chapter Three, "Teaching Congruently," gives a behind-the-scenes glimpse at how I work to make my choices as teacher as clear as possible. I describe influential developments in the fields of therapy, organizational development, teaching, and research that inform my striving for congruency in my teaching practices. I highlight concepts that influence my stance as a teacher and keep me honest in my exchanges with students: isomorphism; transparency; ethics of care; partnership accountability (Waldergrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka, & Campbell, 2003); and ethics without virtue (Welch, 1999). In the spirit of transparency, I give students more of a sense of me than the usual curriculum

vitae by situating my ideas and practices in the context of my own life experiences. I demonstrate how I give students a sense of the events and abiding realizations that guide my commitment to my work.

I believe my approach to teacher-student relations is internally consistent with how I train practitioners to address their positions of power in relation to the people who consult with them. I strive to model practices that minimize hierarchy without obscuring power-relations in psychotherapy and other human services; that value all knowledges³ including insider and professional. In Chapter Four, “Reckoning with Power” I explore how I reckon with power in the classroom and online. I expose students to reading materials, exercises, assignments, and conversation regarding understanding power and using it well. Together, we challenge traditional myths about insider knowledge, and examine “professionalism.” I illustrate a more transparent approach to power with a section on learning from my mistakes and experimenting with evaluation.

Students often describe feeling excited, stimulated, and overwhelmed as they first meet the ideas and practices of narrative therapy through video viewing, exercises, classroom and online discussion, guest speakers, and class readings. I assign readings about specific narrative practices, give students hands-on experiences with the practices they are studying, and start an online forum for students to reflect on their experiences. In Chapter Five, “When Nice is Not Enough,” I share some candid student reflections and questions they have posted online as they grapple to understand how best to position themselves in relation to the people they aspire to serve. As practitioners-in-training, they feel the pressure to “get it right,” struggling with self-doubt and self-surveillance. They exchange stories that convey confusion and disorientation as they question previously held assumptions. Students and I become partners in learning as we interact online about key concepts: the culture of applause, cheerleading practices, and the strengths perspective – always striving to make room for complexities.

Section Two: Multiple Voices

A course website makes it possible to archive students’ ponderings, questions, and realizations as they engage with course materials. I include many student voices; their stories as much as mine bring this project to life. Through anecdote and personal reflection, I share my own teaching stories, many of which have been archived through my course websites. I aspire to follow the advice of my mentor, Lynn Hoffman, when I told her about my intention to fill this book with students’ voices: “Take your writing out of the homespun sack of materials that fills up magically behind you. I like the edge of wonder – of ‘what ever will come next?’ If that’s not there, the work dries up.”

In my teaching, I incorporate others as “living” resources to me and the students. Throughout the book, I show how the online medium makes it possible for students to interact not only with each other, but with visitors to their course. A “guest pass” makes it possible for guest speakers, authors and virtual visitors to engage in online conversation with students on the course website. Guest speakers

come to class to speak from the perspective of the service seeker. Other guests visit the classroom and/or the course website to engage with students around their work as practitioners and authors. In Chapter Six, “Peopling the Course,” I demonstrate how having guests join students in dialogue shifts and enriches experiences in the classroom and online. I give accounts of what becomes possible as well as what the teacher surrenders when choosing to instruct in this way.

I have discovered that students will go to far greater lengths to understand a concept or develop a practice when they have opportunities to apply it to the living of their own lives. In this book, I describe classroom exercises and online conversation through which students take up and live the actual ideas and practices they are studying. They develop a sense of a learning community as they share their reflections and assignments in class and online with one another. They apply their deconstructive listening skills to examine previously held assumptions about cheerleading and pointing out positives. In Chapter Seven, I offer the “Preferred Stories of Identity” assignment through which reflective practitioners directly experience the narrative practices they are studying. I share student’s experiences as they learn the re-authoring conversations map that guides the interviewer to attend to expressions of initiatives in harmony with what a person holds precious (Thomas, 2002; White, 2004c, 2004e).

As a practitioner-teacher, I believe it is important not only to showcase the masters’ work, but to share recordings of one’s own. People who have come to consult with me graciously give me permission to share recordings of interviews, read aloud their poems, letters, and journal entries – anything that makes their stories come alive. I demonstrate in Chapter Eight, “Teaching Stories,” ways in which people who have consulted with me bequeath to students compelling stories of their personal experiences in dealing with daunting challenges in their lives. I describe how I use class time to read aloud a riveting account of Kate’s experience of “Hell & Back” – a descent into and recovery from a psychotic depression; I then show how I structure a letter-writing exchange between students and Kate. This chapter demonstrates the tremendous impact a story can have on students, who are moved both by the personal account and by the willingness of people to share their private struggles with such strangers.

Just as narrative therapy challenges assumptions about the absolute privacy of the client-therapist relationship, online learning challenges the academic tradition of prioritizing individualized confidentiality over community sharing. In this book, I demonstrate how innovative teaching practices can use therapeutic documents and “public practices” that incorporate audiences to consult with each other and with outside consultants around shared themes. In Chapter Nine, “Public Practices” (Lobovits et al., 1995), I share my strategies for practicing an ethic of circulation while still protecting privacy and allowing students to choose the extent to which they share their stories and personal reflections with others. I illustrate how I structure teaching environments that incorporate students as audiences to learn directly from guest speakers, recorded interviews and story-telling. In particular, I describe some of the far-reaching impact of one woman’s story on students to illustrate the potency of public practices in teaching. Through journal entries,

poems, and letters, I introduce the reader to Nicole and her struggle to overcome anorexia, self-harm and depression; I include letters by students and workshop participants that convey how Nicole's candid accounts ripple into their lives, like echos, inspiring them to connect some of their own stories with hers.

Section Three: Practice, Practice, Practice

In each class, I give students time to hone the narrative skills I have introduced. Chapter Ten, "The Power of Intentional Witnessing," is illustrated with students' online conversations about in-class experiences with live interviews. I demonstrate how students participate as outsider witnesses in a moving interview with their own classmate, Mohammad. I also include a transcribed excerpt of an in-class interview with guest visitor Nicole, where students artfully participate in an outsider witness team. Throughout, I show how online forums give students opportunities to reflect, inquire, and build community as they explore possibilities and limits for personal sharing in outsider witness practices. I conclude the chapter with reflections and commentaries from Mohammad and Nicole about their experiences with being the focus of interviews with a reflecting team format.

Therapeutic letters are an aspect of narrative practice with a wealth of possibilities limited only by the imagination. In Chapter Eleven, "Teaching Letter - Writing Skills," I offer specific tips for letter-writing that use note-taking of direct quotes to enable letter writers to ask questions from a stance of earnest curiosity. I give three exemplary examples of preferred letter-writing practices from teaching and therapy situations. Through archived online reflections, I show how students give voice to such complexities as breaking through an internalized therapeutic gaze and speaking from their own voices, reflecting their own hard-earned wisdom. I describe how students practice their letter-writing skills in response to hearing insider accounts through guest speakers, in-class interviews, video-viewing, and storytelling. Students appreciate writing letters to someone real, not imagined, as this forces them to practice this skill knowing their letter will mean something to its intended reader. I provide a glimpse into the vibrant online conversation that each of these classroom experiences has generated as people with experience knowledge teach students invaluable lessons about how much ethical, useful practice means to them.

Chapter Twelve, "Remember to Ask the Cook," illustrates the learning and understanding that results from students consulting with experienced service seekers about their preferences regarding service provision. I share insider accounts I use in my classes that include tips for practitioners from the following people: parents of children with special needs; Alan, an adopted teenager who experienced foster care; and Meghan, a survivor of sexual abuse, family violence, psychopathologizing, and psychiatric maltreatment. Students write letters and/or participate in reflecting teamwork in response to these teaching stories.

Students often struggle to integrate their studies of narrative practice with other cherished learnings, and to adapt practices resonant with their own personal styles.

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I want them to understand that the narrative approach does not come “naturally,” as it is so different from the psychodynamic therapies that many of them have been studying (White, 2001). In Chapter Thirteen, “Apprenticing to a Craft,” I draw from archived correspondence and students’ online discussion to give examples of how everyone, including the teacher, works on skill-building. Letter-writing assignments in the classroom and on the course website provide students additional opportunities to practice, critique, and revise their therapeutic documents. I illustrate with a “Take-Two” letter writing activity.

Finally, Chapter Fourteen, “Practice, Practice, Practice” explores how a teaching environment can encourage students to learn specific technical skills based on poststructuralist approaches in counseling while simultaneously developing their own unique ways of working. The possible applications extend well beyond the realm of psychotherapy to practitioners in a variety of community service contexts. I give an insider view of students’ commitments to making differences in both the private and public sectors, and to moving beyond the isolated private world of therapy to join larger communities that share social justice concerns.

BOOK FORMAT

I intend for this book to be reader-friendly and written in a collegial tone. I quote numerous online exchanges where students, myself, and guest visitors explore aspects of the history and culture of psychotherapy, grapple with provocative questions, and learn about narrative therapy. By including interactive material gathered from the course websites, I aim for a dialogical experience rather than drawing on a traditional monological text (Bakhtin, Emerson, & Holquist, 1990; Lysack, 2006). Throughout this book, I weave in my ongoing consultation with students to keep in touch with how their learning is proceeding and do my utmost to assist their progress.

Student Voices

Students generously gave me permission to weave their voices throughout this book. I strive to capture the back and forth and zigzagging of online conversation by including reflections and postings in a consistent format. Single online postings are highlighted as follows:

Posting by Kerry1

Of course you may use anything I posted that you wish. I am flattered that I said something that may be helpful to someone else someday. This course has really been transformative for me and brought me to places I would not have gotten to on my own – at least not in this short period of time.

I use pseudonyms for some students, while others prefer I use their real names. I distinguish between two students with the same name by using “Kerry1” and “Kerry2”. Several students reviewed this manuscript and gave many useful

recommendations. They became my “co-researchers” in sharing their preferred ways of learning, reflecting on specific classroom, reading and online activities, and actively shaping the learning environment. In narrative practice, “co-research” refers to the process by which people inquire together to create original research about insider knowledges (Epston, 1999).

I offer students’ behind-the-scenes accounts as they make discoveries and reflect upon unique realizations in applying narrative concepts and practices to their own lives and work contexts. Their reflections and questions make us partners in learning, deeply impacting the choices I make as teacher, and now as author.

Insider Knowledges

As a practitioner, I carry a deeply held commitment to taking a position that does not privilege professional “expert” knowledge over client knowledge. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz is widely attributed for drawing the distinction between expert and local knowledge (Geertz, 1973, 1983). Professional expertise is knowledge that is written, published, and given cultural credibility; local knowledge is based on a person’s knowledge that grows from her or his daily life. Local knowledge is synonymous with “insider knowledge” or “experience knowledge” (Walnum, 2007), the terms I most often use.

Throughout the book, I include powerful stories that people in the designated role of client have graciously shared with students through class visits, video recordings, and journal entries. People with “experience knowledge” have generously collaborated with me to review the chapters that include their stories. Together we have changed identifying information to protect their privacy. I believe their stories will enlighten you, the reader, as has been my experience and that of my students. With this book, their circle of influence widens and they become teachers for all of us⁴.

In situations where these stories are from young people I worked with whose parents I got to know as well, I asked these young clients to invite their parents to join them in reviewing the manuscript and making choices about how to publicly tell stories that impact their family privacy. Through conversation, parents came to understand how important it felt to their children to speak out publicly so others could learn from their life experiences. Reviewing Chapter 8, Kate’s mom described what “an emotional journey” it was to revisit from a parent’s point of view her daughter’s reflections on a descent into a psychotic depression at age 18. Still, she supported her daughter’s choice to leave in some identifiable details: “Kate’s ongoing concern to ‘normalize’ and almost publicize the mental health struggles that she and so many others have had to cope with is a frame of mind that I think our whole family honors.”

Alan, who gives suggestions to social workers based on his experience being adopted from foster care as a young boy in Chapter 12, told me that using a pseudonym would symbolize that he was afraid to be who he really is. “I am proud to be who I am and nothing will ever change that.” Through conversation, Alan’s

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parents learned how much this meant to their son and gave their support to Alan's position:

My parents thought at first that because I live a small town, word would jump around fast about my life story and they wanted to make sure that what I was doing was the right choice. I talked to them about it because I think that it would be better if the news travelled faster than slower so it would get to more people in a short amount of time and would be heard of as a boy who has advice as a person who had a hard early childhood and wanted to help out as many people as he could.

Again and again, students demonstrate how much they learn from hearing life stories directly from the people who have lived them. Through their letters and online reflections, students also share ways in which these stories resonate with their own experiences and transport them to new understandings.

My Voice

Writing this book has given me the opportunity to “show and tell” my approach to teaching. Throughout the writing process, I repeatedly faced my growing edge as a teacher and as a writer. I am more comfortable demonstrating than describing what I do and believe. In response to my reviewers' encouragement, I weave in my own voice, reflecting on how my teaching embodies the concepts and practices that I aspire to teach. In addition to bringing in multiple voices, I frequently return to my own voice, striving to ground each chapter in my experiences of teaching and witnessing this kind of learning. I reflect on my own edges of learning as I aspire to live the values and intentions that influence my chosen theoretical framework. I describe an interactive process in which I play the facilitator and guide – a process that strives to meet each student at her or his learning edge and has the flexibility to scaffold each person's learning from that point (Vygotsky, 1986). I try to show my thinking behind intentional choices, such as letting students know why I choose to incorporate many voices in the classroom. I explore the tensions of embracing a collaborative poststructuralist position within structuralist institutions and systems of care (Madsen, 2007c).

I openly position myself as a learner in the process. When I teach this way, I believe students are more likely to experience themselves as teachers, akin to how people who consult with therapists gain confidence in their own knowledge when they teach the therapist about what is most meaningful to them in particular life situations and relationships. Besides, I speak in earnest when I express how much I learn from my students.

Hence this book chronicles a personal journey of discovery in using blended learning methods to teach narrative therapy. My writing reflects a personal approach where I speak from my own experiences as teacher and practitioner. I do my utmost throughout the book to discern between this personal style and teaching rigorous practice skills. Every teacher must find her or his own unique teaching style; in this book, I show you mine.

TEACHING NARRATIVE PRACTICE

Posting by Bobbi

I have gained an intense awareness of the importance of asking questions that open the possibilities and knowing when to thicken the plot. There is an art to this. I try to take deep cleansing breaths and tell myself that I know this intuitively; then a nagging worry returns. Worry is interfering with my ability to feel comfortable with the practice. I am interested in slowing down and learning how to let others make connections for themselves and letting go of the pressure to be the expert “fix-it person.” I was thinking here about listening as breathing...I am hopeful that the maps will provide me with some scaffolding about where and how to begin.

A learning “collaboratory” is highly congruent with the focus and values of narrative therapy, where there is a priority and an ethical commitment to develop practices in which therapy is a reciprocal two-way process (White & Denborough, 2005; White, 1997c). The online interaction has proven a rich source of give-and-take that immeasurably deepens students’ understanding of concepts and practices.

My narrative practice has been – and continues to be – inspired by excellent articles and texts on narrative therapy (Epston, 1998; Freedman & Combs, 1996a; Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; Morgan, 2000b; Payne, 2000; Russell & Carey, 2004; Smith & Nylund, 1997; White, 1997c, 2000b, 2004b, 2007d; White & Epston, 1990a). Thus far, the published literature on teaching narrative therapy is primarily in article and book chapter form (Jorniak & Paré, 2007; Lewis & Cheshire, 2007; Marsten & Howard, 2006; Mckenzie & Monk, 1997; White & Denborough, 2005; White, 1992; Winslade, 2003; Winslade, Crocket, Monk, & Drewery, 2000). I hope this book will further contribute to this growing literature and hence further legitimize teaching narrative practice in academic institutions.

Narrative therapy provides the conceptual framework to think in terms of people’s lives as “storied,” and of considering possibilities for giving new meaning to such experiences (White & Epston, 1990a). Therapists in narrative explorations adopt a position of inquiry guided by the craft and art of narrative interviewing to assist those seeking their services to explore their own ideas developed over the history of living their lives (White, 2007c). Narrative inquiry brings forth a person’s specific and unique ways to approach life’s difficulties, and to articulate what they intimately know about their own lives and relationships.

“Narrative practice” is a term that is replacing “narrative therapy,” with many applications beyond the therapy room. Many students who work in public sector settings such as early childhood care and education, social services, and community mental health have readily adapted this change in language (Hancock & Epston, 2007). The narrative therapy literature has begun to explore the application of narrative practices in community circumstances (Collective, 1999;

Hancock, Chilcott, & Epston, 2007; Madsen, 2007c; White, 2003a). Recent literature on social work education recognizes narrative therapy as a values-based practice approach, and explores its applicability as a model of narrative-deconstructive practice to bridge the gap between clinical and social practice (Epston, Gavin, & Napan, 2004; Ungar, 2004; Vodde & Gallant, 2003). In this book, students explore possible applications for narrative practice that extend well beyond the realm of psychotherapy into using family-centered practices in a range of public sector work settings.

Narrative pedagogy is guided by a particular set of intentions, ethics, and aesthetics. Teachers informed by poststructuralist inquiry seek to develop intentional understandings of what is most precious to us in teaching and what we stand for in our beliefs, values, hopes, dreams, principles, commitments, and ethics. My teaching intention is to offer opportunities for reflective practitioners-in-training to step into the experiences of those they aspire to help, to listen attentively, and learn to hold themselves accountable to the seekers of their services. I want students to move beyond traditional power relations to better understand help-giving practices that contribute to more equitable relationships between human service providers and the people they aspire to help.

Narrative Principles in Action

Narrative therapy course content brings together folk psychology traditions and formal academic training (White, 2004a). Personal accounts of experience are respected sources of knowledge. Within narrative interviewing practices, insider knowledges are privileged over expert vocabularies, and significant care is taken to ensure that language conveys people's actual experiences, rather than others' interpretations of these experiences. Teachers of narrative therapy face the challenge of deliberately accenting local knowledge and minimizing academic jargon, while learning concepts, values, and practices that fulfill standardized accreditation requirements.

Throughout the book, I illustrate ways in which the teacher's commitment to experience knowledge can inform learning experiences. Students read memoirs of pioneers in family therapy (Beels, 2001; Hoffman, 2002) and hear first-person accounts from people who describe their hard-earned preferences in therapy and other human services. Through exercises and assignments, students carry out and reflect upon the skills and knowledges they bring to their work as reflective practitioners (Sax, 2006).

In two-way accounts of therapy, the therapist takes responsibility to identify, acknowledge, and describe specific ways a therapeutic conversation contributes to his or her life (White, 1997c). This approach has emerged from a tradition of engagement that differs from traditional therapeutic practices in which the therapist examines his or her experiences of therapeutic conversations through the construct of counter-transference. I believe two-way and even multiple accounts of learning

are important aspects of a learning collaboratory, as well as to collaborative approaches to therapeutic conversations. Multiple accounts make it possible for people to learn some of the real effects of their stories on others – including people in elevated positions of power such as professional service providers and teachers.

Online communication offers multiple opportunities to structure courses to move beyond a one-way account of learning. Students benefit from knowing not only the influence of their stories on each other, but on my work as their teacher. In writing and in person, I strive to render visible the powerful ways in which students' work and thoughtful exchanges touch my life. I illustrate this book with many examples of the “two-way accounts” principle in action. With students' permission, I often share their work with others. Students are generally not only willing to have me share their on-line postings and writings, but highly appreciative of being able to contribute to others' learning. As Olivia emailed back to me “I feel like it wasn't an accident that my work traveled to other people. Every time I heard that my work was touching someone I also became touched powerfully. This is the beauty of narrative therapy isn't it? All parties end up being enriched by their work together.”

The interactive website offers opportunities for a network of multiple accounts – for students to see themselves through many eyes within a web of connection. By reflecting online together about real effects on each other, the students gain experiential understanding that sticks with them well beyond their readings about two-way accounts. Again, this conversation does not revolve around me. I see my role here as a facilitator, to create and monitor forums for such lively exchanges to occur. I am often moved by the clear acknowledgements students give to each other especially since the teacher's evaluative role can add complexity to the teacher-student exchanges.

The course website offers online opportunities for ongoing inquiry with students about the effects of a particular classroom, reading, or online activity on their learning experience. While I offer the students certain knowledge and skills about teaching and therapeutic approach, I am always learning from their experiences. Each semester, I build on what I have learned from prior teaching while experimenting with new possibilities. Students express intrigue in hearing about what I learn from them. I have collected interesting responses to the following forum I began during the last week of class. I posted this forum after students learned about “two-way accounts” in their course readings and classroom discussion:

If you could experience yourselves through my eyes, what do you imagine you might see? Does it surprise you to hear that the ways you have engaged with the course materials has affected me and my sense of identity both as a teacher and as a life-long learner? In reflecting on this learning experience, what stands out to you? What have you learned from each other? What would you like to know from me about my experience(s) of this class?

PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Posting by Amy

For the longest time I viewed education from the dominant discourse of “filling a bucket” and writing down “facts” that I would later study and recite back on standardized exams. I learned how to work the system to meet the institution’s expectations. Now, I have come to realize that education is so much more. It’s lighting that spark of inquiry into alternative understandings that create space for multiple viewpoints with no ultimate “truth” or “fact.”

I have been heartened to discover a burgeoning literature that has grown out of the seminal work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire on popular and informal education (Freire, 1973, 1994, 1996) and the relevance for adult education (Apple, 2000, 2002, 2003; Vella, 1995a, 1995b). Freire questioned a “banking” concept of education where teachers deposit knowledge into the students’ depositories. Banking education maintains a teacher-student dichotomy where those considered knowledgeable issue one-way communiqués and deposit their knowledge into those who know nothing. Freire lists ten attitudes and practices as also mirrored in oppressive cultural forces (Freire, 1973) p. 54:

- a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;*
- b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;*
- c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;*
- d) the teacher talks and the students listen meekly;*
- e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;*
- f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;*
- g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;*
- h) the teacher chooses the program content and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it;*
- i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;*
- j) the teacher is the subject of the learning process, which the pupils are mere objects.*

Freire proposed that education should instead seek to reconcile the student-teacher contradiction. I believe Freire’s philosophy of education is highly relevant to adult education, including training practitioners in academic settings. His pedagogy highlights democracy, dialogue, and reciprocity as educational methods that situate education in the lived experience of all participants, including the teacher. As co-creators in “authentic thinking,” the teacher partners with the student focusing on realities beyond ivory tower isolation. These educational principles orient everyone toward putting theoretical knowledge into practice or “praxis” – a synthesis of theory and practice in which each informs each other.

I too believe in working together with students to develop consciousness and committed action informed by and linked to values.

Postmodern Pedagogy

Postmodernism is a cultural phenomenon affecting philosophy, architecture, literature, music and other expressive arts. Jacques Derrida, Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty and other postmodern philosophers offer an outlook on education that challenges conventions, fosters innovation and change, encourages tolerance of ambiguity, emphasizes diversity, and accentuates the social construction of reality. Many narrative practitioners prefer the more specific term poststructuralism to describe an approach to inquiry that questions the concept of “self” as a singular and coherent entity, and is in contrast to structuralism’s truth claims (Thomas, 2002; White, 1997b). I am not an expert on current debates about postmodernism and poststructuralism. However, I do believe my approach to teaching shares pedagogical challenges with others who embrace a collaborative outlook on education. I sometimes chose the umbrella terms “postmodern” or “collaborative” therapies as an effort to unify a diversity of approaches – not to obscure distinctions.

In 2002, I attended a workshop⁵ that piqued my curiosity about the pedagogical challenges for teachers and trainers of postmodern therapies in academic settings. It spurred me to consider the parallels in power relations between the therapist/client and teacher/student relationships, and of the many institutionalized assumptions in academia that remain unexamined. How can teachers of postmodern therapies position themselves to teach and supervise in ways that are consistent with the values and guiding principles to which we aspire? Are there ways for teachers and students to respectfully discover and learn from two-way accounts of the learning experience?

As editors of a special issue of the *Journal of Systemic Therapies on Teaching and Learning Postmodern Therapies*, Paré and Tarragona contemplate pedagogical questions for teachers and trainers of postmodern therapies that “share a respectful, collaborative spirit that reflects a loosened grip on truth claims and purported expertise” (Paré & Tarragona, 2006, p. 2). They describe postmodern epistemologies as “reminding us that knowledge is not so much handed over as it is co-constructed through mutual talk.” In this book, I respond to their question, “How might we teach conceptual frameworks and therapeutic interventions without simply duplicating modernist traditions that privilege instructors’ knowledges”?

Lynn Hoffman drew from a specific exchange between students to reflect on her experience with the difference between “lions” and “lambs” in discussion groups. “Lions usually have their hands up and take strong stands, and they get called on and feel more and more intelligent. Lambs hold back, and don’t often hold up their hands, and begin to feel more and more stupid. Gianfranco Cecchin called this result “systemic genius” and “systemic stupidity.” In one group, a student objected that Lynn was against “open and honest discussion.” When Lynn explained about

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the lions and lambs, the student reflected, “Oh, I see, it’s like affirmative action for shy people.”

Since that time, Lynn has become increasingly interested in conversations that do not require consensus, and allow many voices to be heard. She captured my students’ attention with her online description of Jean-Francois Lyotard.

Posting by Lynn

The man who defined postmodernism, Jean-Francois Lyotard, called this way of talking “paralogical.” He meant that rather than following the logic of reason, which says there is a right and a wrong answer, you bypass logic and open the doors to many voices often in contradiction to one another.

Interacting in the online conversation with students in my course reminded Lynn of poet John Keats’ concept of “negative capability” – the ability to remain in the midst of doubts and uncertainties “without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” For Lynn, the virtue of this online conversation was that it never descended into escalations and arguments about who and what is right. “Even when people did take stands one way or another, they never put each other in the wrong. So, Peggy, I think you successfully set the stage for what I think of as a ‘postmodern’ type of discourse.”

Ethical Considerations

“Stick to the ‘heart of what matters to you’ so that you teach not as a measurable performance but rather because you believe what you have to say has to be said” (Epston, 2006).

Ethics is an important content area in every course about therapeutic or counseling relationships. I have participated in many conversations with colleagues about creating space for discussing ethical considerations and dilemmas in our work as practitioners⁶. We note a common phenomenon – material about ethics usually focuses on professional codes regarding boundaries and confidentiality. Preventing breaches in confidentiality, exploitation, and dual relationships is indeed very important given the egregious violations that can occur and the very real litigious concerns for licensed professionals regulated by professional licensing boards.

In addition, teaching creates space for other ethical decisions that are often pushed to the margins. To whom are we accountable? What does it mean to be a professional and what does professional behavior look like? What about respectful greetings? What about services not available to people with low incomes or to the working poor? I illustrate this book with thoughtful and thought-provoking online exchanges between students, teacher, and outside visitors sparked by sharing favorite passages about the ethics of hospitality, accountability, collaboration, and professionalism (Bird, 2001; Buckley & Decter, 2006; Madsen, 2007a). Archived postings from the interactive websites from my classes afford the opportunity to often gather a vibrant glimpse into such dynamic conversation.

Ethical considerations in teaching collaborative therapies challenge us to:

- Teach in ways that are consistent with the philosophy and therapeutic stance to which we aspire;
- Offer our own knowledge and expertise without disqualifying students knowledges and skills;
- Be accountable to power relations between teacher-student; and
- Create contexts for collaborative learning.

The aesthetics of teaching postmodern therapies are based on personal style, preferences, and unique teaching abilities. We learn about our own special teaching skills when they are reflected back to us. Often this occurs through evaluation by supervisors, student feedback, and friendly critique from colleagues. In this book, I highlight learning about my own distinctive teaching abilities through exploration of special teaching moments. By sharing memorable experiences in the classroom and online, I strive to demonstrate how students actively guide my teaching preferences with a spirit of collaborative inquiry (Roth, 2007).

Respect for School Culture

Posting by Nan

I am both in line with others' affirmations of collaborative approaches to psychotherapy and, at the same time, questioning of these very same views of this newer form of therapy as being the one, right way of approaching the challenging task of helping people. Perhaps my unique respect for and skepticism of narrative therapy is rooted in my education in the area of psychology. Until now, I had yet to be exposed to this emerging field of thought, having instead been trained in the more traditional, individual psychology perspective. This unique experience of mine has shaped my accolades and criticisms alike of narrative therapy, and it is from this stance that I share my thoughts on the subject.

Students study narrative therapy within undergraduate and graduate programs with particular philosophical traditions. Teaching collaborative therapies in different academic settings – some with vastly different traditions and values – highlights the importance of respect for school culture. I have learned the hard way how my biases inform my teaching. I strive to learn directly from students' understandings about their particular school culture and what they most deeply value from their studies. In constructing course requirements, I vary my expectations according to different school cultures⁷.

Students often share their dilemmas as they imagine putting narrative therapy into practice alongside other therapeutic approaches. For example, students learning transference-based therapies are particularly perplexed as they seek an eclectic approach that might encompass psychodynamic in addition to solution focused, cognitive-behavioral and narrative therapies. Social work students revisit their understanding of “the strengths perspective.” Psychology students often

struggle to understand the implications of post-structuralist notions of identity and development. In each of these situations, the online forum provides a safe haven for provocative conversation.

Not everyone is enamored with narrative therapy. I often feel a creative tension between making space for different voices and my responsibility to teach narrative therapy. How much room is there for complexity when questions come from contradictory points of view? How can I avoid the dangers of “group think” so students can speak candidly about their skeptical thoughts and feelings? Over the years, I have discovered some personal edges of learning as I strive to listen respectfully to others drawn to different therapeutic traditions. At the same time, I believe it does not work for students to continually attempt to interpret narrative practice through the language of a different approach. To the extent possible, I encourage students to temporarily check their competing beliefs at the door, so they can attend to learning this particular approach. For example, I was heartened when by the end of a semester a student from a Freudian psychoanalytic tradition told me that he had come to understand my encouragement to listen and experience narrative therapy without trying to see everything according to the id, ego, and superego.

Posting by Jordana

Engaging with this narrative material has been rather humorous for me because I have realized, to my surprise, how influenced by traditional psychology I am. Long-held assumptions that I took for granted regarding what is helpful to a client have been challenged. I am grateful to this class for having opened me up to ideas requiring a real shift in my thinking as to what is healing for people and communities. It is not that I should sit with my clients and “process” their emotions in a “narrative way” as I originally presumed. Rather, what is healing is the new story and its plot and the new way of being in the world that it allows.

Teaching narrative practice within a psychodynamic program poses particular challenges as students seek to integrate their psychodynamic studies with narrative practice. Narrative therapy introduces a paradigm shift in relation to the meaning and practice of therapy from intra-psychic, transference-based psychotherapies to a focus on historical and cultural context (McLeod, 1997, 2001). In this book, I include questions from students who are studying narrative therapy while also learning psychodynamic traditions. I believe there is much to learn from their thoughtful examination of theory and practice. Many of their questions remain unanswered and their confusion lingers throughout the course. I tell them that this “not-knowing” tension is something I greatly value. To add to the confusion, I introduce the concepts of “ethics with ambiguity” and “ethics without virtue.” (Welch, 1999), encouraging students to develop skills to hold moral and political complexities without resorting to “Us against Them” thinking.

Teaching narrative practice in a postmodern social work program is a very different experience. By the time I meet these students, many have developed

sophisticated knowledge of social constructionism, the strengths perspective, social justice, and human rights. Prior teachers introduced them to narrative therapy and now they are eager to learn all they can. In many ways, I feel with such students as though I have arrived in “teaching heaven.” In this book, I describe my discovery of another set of challenges as students learn to put ideas into practice. I include reflections and questions by students steeped in the strengths perspective to convey how they work together to disengage from well-meaning practices of applause, to move beyond pointing out positives to “asking not telling” people their stories.

Throughout this book, I try to be transparent in describing my approach to the challenge as teacher of narrative therapy to convey respect and curiosity while not encouraging a forced marriage between narrative and psychodynamic practice. Many students of psychodynamic therapy have already committed to following another course of study and/or they hesitate before delving into learning an approach that is so different from their other courses. When students cannot immerse themselves in the course material, I strive to kindle a fire for pursuing the study of narrative practice in the coming years. Often students of psychodynamic therapy are taught a simplistic view of narrative therapy in comparison to the highly nuanced traditions of transference-based psychotherapy. In my teaching, I aim to demonstrate the depth and complexity of narrative therapy practice.

I invite you, the reader, to enjoy the exploration.