



Journal of Narrative Family Therapy: Ideas and Practices in the Making

Editors: David Epston and Tom Stone Carlson

Editors' Notes

In 1992, David Epston and Michael White issued what has come to be known as a manifesto of sorts for narrative therapy. In their 'manifesto' David and Michael made the following declaration:

With regard to ideas and practices, we do not believe that we are in any one place at a particular point in time, rarely in particular places for very long. In making this observation, we are not suggesting that the developments in our work are sharply discontinuous- they are not. Nor are we suggesting that our values and our commitments are varying- they are not. And, we are definitely not arguing for forms of eclecticism which we eschew. However, we are drawing attention to the fact that one of the aspects associated with this work that is of central importance to us is the spirit of adventure... What will be the direction of this evolution? It could be tempting to make pronouncements about this. But these would be too hard to live by. And besides, our sense is that most of the 'discoveries' that have played a significant part in the development of our practices... have been made after the fact (in response to...our work with families), with theoretical considerations assisting us to extend the limits of these practices. We acknowledge the fact that it is always so much easier to be 'wise' in hindsight than in foresight (p. 9).

With this spirit of adventure in mind, we are announcing the launching of a new *Journal of Narrative Family Therapy (JNFT)* that will be dedicated to reimagining the future of narrative family therapy practice. It is our hope that JNFT will serve as a spark that reignites the spirit of adventure, innovations, and discovery that is so central to the commitments and concerns of narrative practice. In order to facilitate this, we have every intention that JNFT will operate more like an anti-journal through the publication of innovative papers that attempt to capture practices and ideas that inform them that are 'in their very making.' We are not seeking papers that are 'polished' or that attempt to present 'completed' ideas. Rather, it is our hope that JNFT will serve as a co-laboratory of invention, where half-baked and novel ideas and practices will be shared with the broader narrative family therapy community in the midst of their very invention. With this purpose in mind, JNFT will not operate like a traditional journal where





papers, and the ideas and practices within them, are already several years old before they are published. Instead, JNFT is committed to making the work of authors/innovators available as quickly as possible and encourage the participatory engagement of other innovator narrative family therapists who will engage directly with authors/innovators to study, explore, try-out, and expand the ideas to the furthest extent possible.

In this inaugural issue of JNFT, we are excited to introduce readers to three new innovative papers by David Epston (New Zealand) and Tom Stone Carlson (USA) and one new storied practice paper by Sasha Pilkington (New Zealand). The three innovative papers highlight the development of an exciting new performance based practice in narrative therapy called “Insider Witnessing Practices.” While Insider Witnessing Practices have only recently been introduced to the narrative therapy community, it is a practice that has been in the making for over 25 years under the careful guidance of David Epston. Insider Witnessing Practices represent the very latest in narrative therapy thinking and practice and are intended to serve as a counterpoint to Michael White’s ‘Outsider Witnessing Practices.’ Early research of the outcomes of IWPs have been promising as clients have reported that this one session (90 minute interview) is worth 20 to 25 sessions of narrative therapy.

Storied practice papers will play a prominent role in JNFT. These anti-academic papers are written in the spirit of narrative storytelling and represent a way of writing that moves beyond a mere clinical description of practice through an “in the moment” storytelling approach that seeks to place the reader in the ‘mind and heart’ of the therapist. It is a style of writing that is intended to be a form of artistic expression (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) that seeks to “awaken the experiences” (p. 19) of the reader and allows the practice to “take root in the consciousness of others” (p. 19). The inaugural storied practice paper is written by Sasha Pilkington an experienced narrative therapist and storied practice writer. Her paper, “Deconstructing Denial: Stories of Narrative Therapy with People Who Are Dying and Their Families,” addresses the important issues that we face in our work with people as we attempt to honor the various ways that people meet with the challenges of death and the loss of a loved one.





Introduction by David Epston to the three part series: Insider Witnessing Practices papers

This is the first of a series of three papers outlining the invention, development, and early outcomes of a novel approach to narrative therapy called Insider Witnessing Practices. I have been developing Insider Witnessing Practices for over 25 years as a counterpart to Michael's "Outsider Witnessing Practices." However, it wasn't until I stumbled upon some readings from anthropology and performance studies and my eventual partnership with my friend and colleague Tom Stone Carlson, just over two years ago, that the full potential of Insider Witnessing Practices was put to the test. The three papers in this inaugural issue of the Journal of Narrative Family Therapy detail the efforts that we have undertaken over the past two years to scrutinize every aspect of Insider Witnessing Practices through an intensive co-research process with student therapists and their clients at North Dakota State University, where this practice was developed. We are fortunate enough to have recorded and transcribed every single instance of Insider Witnessing Practices from its very inception, giving us the unique opportunity to scrutinize and study our practice in the midst of its very invention. Due to the collaborative nature of our co-researching process, we also have recorded and transcribed the accounts of the experience of each of the student therapists and clients who have participated in this practice. Needless to say, their accounts have been invaluable in helping us develop a vocabulary to describe and to attempt to account for the quite unexpected and very promising outcomes of our experience with Insider Witnessing Practices thus far.

The three papers in this series are intended to be read as 'companion papers'. The first paper is unique in that it is not intended to offer an explanation of this practice; rather it is meant to convey the spirit of adventure and wonder that we all experienced as were immersed in the invention of Insider Witnessing Practices. I invite you to read this first paper with this spirit in mind and free yourself of any worry about trying to understand or comprehend what Insider Witnessing Practices are all about. It is a paper that is meant to be experienced rather than understood. The second paper offers a historical and a very tentative theoretical account of Insider Witnessing Practices. It also includes a detailed description of the practice itself, along with client accounts of their experiences of participating in this practice as our co-researchers. The third paper, provides an account of Miranda's experience of participating in Insider Witnessing Practices and its transformative effect on her life. It is written almost entirely in her words, taken from transcripts of her initial Insider Witnessing interview and subsequent follow up interviews as a co-researcher. As it turned out, Miranda was the very first person that Tom interviewed using Insider Witnessing Practices. The effect of this initial 90 minute Insider Witnessing Practices interview was so transformative for Miranda that her entire experience was turned into a dramatic play using verbatim accounts of her transcribed interviews that have subsequently been performed in various places throughout the world.

