



Narrative Francophone Countries By Catherine Mengelle

Introduction

As I was about to send the first draft of a book I was writing on narrative practices (NP), David was getting in touch with Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun regarding those practices in the francophone world. An important part of my book relates the history of NPs, particularly their early years of development in France, so I was the one who ended up replying to David's enquiry and I decided to expand my work outside of France, to the francophone world. I contacted Charlie Crettenand in Switzerland who, in turn, interviewed Rodolphe Soulignac. Charlie also researched André Grégoire's contribution to NPs¹ in Québec. André taught NPs in French-speaking European countries for many years. For my part, I sought to retrieve the first French characters involved in this story in an attempt to re-tell it... But we all know the tricks memory can play on us. After giving it some thought, I came to the decision that it would be better to let everyone tell their own story in their own words. That being said, this new approach is pushing me to considerably review the draft of my book. Thank you David, your inquiry was very timely! Thank you also to all those who kindly accepted my request to travel back in time.

The story seen from Bordeaux, told by Catherine

In 2004, Michael White replied positively to an invitation from Isabelle Laplante and Nicolas de Beer to come to France to facilitate a Narrative Therapy workshop. Isabelle Laplante and Nicolas de Beer were the CEOs of Mediat-Coaching, a training center located in Paris which has since been closed². Fabrice Michaud, a coach and facilitator in Bordeaux, attended this workshop. Fabrice told Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun, "You are a coach, a musician and a writer; you should look into these practices, you'll be able to use all your talents in one go!" Pierre's curiosity being piqued, he decided to enroll in the next seminar which was to take place in 2005. Shona Russel and Sue Mann facilitated this workshop for Mediat-Coaching. In 2006 and 2007 Michael White returned to Paris. Again, Pierre attended both workshops. Following in Michael's footsteps and accepting once again Mediat-Coaching's invitation, Sue and Shona delivered the 2008 workshop. Elizabeth Feld joined in at that time. Pierre then decided to fly to Adelaide to the next International Conference on Narrative Practices, the first one to take place after Michael's death. In Adelaide, he shared an apartment with Nicolas de Beer and Jean-Louis Roux. This time, and for the first time, he attended David Denborough and Stephen Madigan's workshops. In 2009, a translation of *Maps of Narrative Practice* was published under the auspices of Isabelle and Nicolas. I cannot help but think how incredibly intense those five years must have been for Nicolas and Isabelle!

¹ We will learn further down this article why Narrative Therapy (or NT) became Narrative Practices (or NP) in Francophone countries.

² A group of practitioners still teach Narrative Practices in Paris in a coaching training center called IFOD



In 2009, alongside Elizabeth Feld, Christophe Belud, Sandrine Janssen and Christine Thubé, Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun co-founded La Fabrique Narrative in Bordeaux. This was the start of another intense story. I joined them in 2011 along with Dina Scherrer, and we were soon followed by Fabrice Aimetti, whose narrative T-shirts have become a 'must have' in the francophone narrative community! All of us still feel very moved when remembering an anti-symposium organized by Pierre in Bordeaux, 2009. At the time, like the amazed innocent beginners that we were, we started practicing our narrative scales.

But let's go back to the beginning of our story. In those days, Mediat-Coaching was delivering training sessions called "Orientation Solutions" in which Steve de Shazer had spread Michael's name. For 10 consecutive years, in a school called "Pegase Processus"³ Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg had developed a new way of thinking in France, more particularly in Brittany, in the cities of Saint-Brieux and Rennes. In those western regions of France, they contributed to the construction of a strong solution-focused based network. In a book titled *Les Pratiques de l'Approche Narrative*⁴, Julien Betbèze, a psychiatrist and hypnotherapist, shares with us the somewhat confidential story of the arrival of narrative ideas in the world of French psychotherapy. He explains how Steve de Shazer had many times over exposed his differences and similarities with the work of Michael White. In the nineties, articles on this type of work were starting to be translated and published in journals dedicated to family therapy. In *Panorama des thérapies familiales* published in 2003, Mony Elkaïm, a neuropsychiatrist, wrote a full chapter on narrative practices. Julien goes on to explain, "Therefore, in our culture, Narrative Therapy first came about through conversations on competency-centered, systemic family therapy and Ericksonian approaches. I recall having wonderful and lively conversations with JF Bourse about the translation of Michael White and David Epston's book *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. A translation that he undertook as a solution focused GP-Acupuncturist-Hypnotherapist... May he be thanked".

It is in this context that Michael White came to France for the first time in 2004, having been invited by Nicolas de Beer et Isabelle Laplante who were both already involved in solution-focused practices. The world of psychotherapy can be grateful to the coaching world who contacted Michael White although, despite existing translations, the different branches of family therapy remained stuck in their own belief systems. I remember how surprised I was when I first heard of the arrival of Michael in Paris, directly from the CEO in charge of the publishing company Satas. The seminar was organised by Mediat-Coaching. No information had filtered in the world of psychotherapy. At the beginning of the 21st century, everything was in place for the arrival of Narrative Therapy in France. Despite the sudden death of Michael White in 2008 which could have resulted in a settling down of the narrative movement in France, this

³ Psychotherapy training and research centre

⁴ Published in 2017 by Inter Editions, Paris. This collective and collaborative book coordinated by P Blanc-Sahnoun gathers the different practices of Narrative practitioners.





practice continued to evolve and spread, not only in France but also in Switzerland and Belgium. A very lively francophone community had been born.

Within 10 years, the French narrative community trained many practitioners, particularly in the coaching industry. Many Master Classes had been organized in Paris and in Bordeaux, allowing the French practitioners to adopt the best practices from world-renowned professionals. David Epston, Shona Russel, Sue Mann, Stephen Madigan, David Denborough, Cheryl White, Jill Freeman, Lorraine Hedkt, John Winslade, Peggy Sax and many others have taught in France. Translations kept coming until the French narrative community felt mature enough to publish its own practices in its own language. Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun is still at the forefront of this work, which consists in sharing narrative ideas in France. From 2009 onwards, Pierre became a major stakeholder, launching many initiatives: translations, production of written material and organisation of Master Classes.

He is the one who asked me to translate some of the work of Morgan and Denborough; he encouraged many young practitioners to write about their new, developing practices in several collaborative books. The initial invitation of Michael White by Mediat-Coaching as well as the creation of specific training aimed at coaches is unique to France. Unlike other countries, narrative practices found a more fertile ground within the coaching industry than in the mental health or social work sectors. There is one exception though: Nantes, in western France. As discussed earlier, this is because this region is deeply rooted in solution-focused practices. Bertrand Hénot, who also runs the Hexafor Social Work Training Centre, is deeply committed to training future social workers in narrative practices.

Today, new schools of narrative practices have been created in France, Switzerland and Belgium. These schools are opened to coaches, psychotherapists, psychologists, medical doctors, social workers, managers, family therapists, speech therapists, nurses, etc. This is the reason why we speak of narrative practices, because they are interwoven into many different professional practices. In 2018, the French, Swiss and Belgian narrative communities have slowly merged into what is now called la Fédération Francophone des Pratiques Narratives (FFPN). This new entity has 2 goals. The first is to gather and unite all French-speaking narrative practitioners, regardless of their profession. The second is to release material written or translated into French. In 2014, Rodolphe Soullignac, a psychologist in Geneva, organised the first *Journées Narratives Francophones*⁵. In 2016, Bertrand Hénot and his team organised the *Journées Narratives Francophones* or Francophone Symposium in Nantes. In 2018, this symposium took place in Bordeaux in La Fabrique Narrative. Practitioners from Québec, Switzerland and Belgium came, joined through a video link by Tahitian and Romanian practitioners, and by letter by a practitioner from the Ivory Coast. Marianne Lemineur has been mandated by the FFPN to organise it the next symposium, in Belgium, in 2020.

⁵ Note from the translator: "Journées Narratives Francophones" will be translated into "Francophone Symposium"



The story seen from French-speaking Switzerland, told by Charlie

It is likely that NPs were first introduced to French-speaking Switzerland by a psychiatrist called Dr. Pedro Gonzales. Dr. Gonzales was giving lectures in the faculty of family therapy of the University of Geneva. Having visited Australia in 2003, he had brought back with him a video of Michael White. At the time, this video did not generate much interest; we were used to listening to systemic practitioners who were very guiding and mobile in the therapeutic relationship. In 2010, the first training in NT to happen in Geneva was organised by Rodolphe Soullignac with the support of André Grégoire, a psychologist from Québec. André became Rodolphe's mentor and tutor. He taught in Lausanne and Belgium many times between 2004 and 2008. While André was facilitating an introductory workshop on NT requested by an NGO named Paroles d'Enfants in front of 80 participants in Belgium, Michael White was delivering his first workshop in Paris in front of 12 people. Later, André and Michael met in Paris and shared a laugh about this. NPs in French speaking Switzerland were first taught by 2 psychologists, and from there, they spread to the world of psychology/psychotherapy and psychiatry. In 2016, after having been trained by André Grégoire, Peggy Sax, David Paré and David Epston in Montréal as well as in Vermont, I became a facilitator myself. Today, Relance Narrative has become the main training centre on NPs in French-speaking Switzerland. On top of being active members of the FFPN, Rodolphe and I organise trainings, workshops and supervision. We have been involved in several collective publications and are currently working on a book titled *Eupsychology*, which is about "depathologizing" the act of living thanks to NT.

Lettre d'André à Charlie

Dear Charlie,

Where to start Charlie? You're asking me so many questions.

How about we start in 2005, half way through the story. 2005 marked the beginning of the European Francophone adventure of NT. It all started with the training I facilitated for Paroles d'Enfants in Paris. In addition to their clinical work on sexual abuse within families, this NGO organised all sorts of workshops and symposiums in Francophone countries with the goal of spreading groundbreaking practices and ideas in the care industry. They got a hold of me thanks to one of their facilitators who had talked to them about the work I was doing in Québec. They invited me to present my work twice in Paris: the first time I delivered a workshop on Solution-Focused Therapy and the second time on Narrative Therapy. Needless to tell you how happy I was to get these invitations. In part because I was flattered to be trusted, somehow blindly by these people, but also because I had been waiting for this moment for a long time; how come, in the country where Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and other high powered thinkers came from, no one seemed interested in the work they had unknowingly contributed so much to? I had had a few conversations about this with Michael White and David Epston but they couldn't solve this enigma either.





In 2005, I went to Paris for the first time and delivered a workshop for over 30 professionals from the care industry. They were so thrilled with the training that the following year Paroles d'Enfants invited me again to Paris and Liège. As the 2006 dates were soon arriving, I learned that Michael White was also going to be in Paris at approximately the same time to deliver a workshop for Mediat-coaching. I had met Michael White previously and we agreed to meet for one evening in Paris to share a meal. Needless to tell you how lively our conversation on NT was. Michael was thrilled to be in Paris, in the city where Michel Foucault had developed his powerful ideas. Both of us were excited at the idea that NT was, at last, emerging in the Francophone world. For you to understand this “at last” moment, I need to go back in time and return to the questions you asked about my first encounters with NPs. It started in 1992, when my colleague Josée Lamarre and I created the Training Centre of Strategic Psychotherapy in Montréal. The training sessions we were offering at the time were evolving around Brief Therapies as they were then called. Since I had attended workshops delivered by Steve de Shazer and Bill O’Hanlon, among others, the dominant method we taught was Solution-Focused. Thinking about it today though, I would say that postmodernism was informing our practice, that is, we knew we were constructing reality through language.

In those days, I was devouring any reading that was in any way relating to the constructivist-constructionist perspective. That is how I put my hands on *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* as soon as it was published in the US. In 1993, when I heard of the workshop that Michael White was going to deliver in Burlington, Vermont, my colleague and I immediately enrolled. It was the first training tour that Michael was doing in the States. As far as I was concerned, it was a case of love at first sight; even more so, since Michael had generously and spontaneously agreed to give an interview to be published in our newsletter. That is how we published a special edition of our newsletter in which 8 pages were dedicated to NT. The following years, we built a 2 year training program encompassing Solution-Focused Therapy, Palo Alto Brief Therapy, Eriksonian and Narrative Therapy. A complete cocktail of therapies, you might think! In those days though, everybody was happily talking to each other, there was a genuine feeling of communication between the different approaches and practices. Often, we were attending the same international conferences where all of us would meet, connect and exchange ideas during workshops.

Getting back to my collaboration with Josée Lamarre, as time went by, we drifted apart; I grew closer to Narrative Therapy and she felt closer to Solution-Focused Therapy. That being said, we kept having wonderful conversations and carried great respect for one another. In addition to the training programme we had created, twice a year we would invite international guests to teach a two day long Master Class. In 2000 and 2007, Michael taught those Master Classes. David Epston came in 2004. Those Master Classes were very successful in Québec, gathering from 125 to 150 people; some of whom came from New England in the US and Ontario, Canada. I, myself, was delving deeper and deeper into the realm of NT, primarily through reading material and participating in yearly clinical workshops. Michael facilitated such workshops for years in Toronto; there was not a chance that I would have missed one of those!



I also undertook significant training with Stephen Madigan. As for the NT program you attended, I created it in 2008-2009. I feel the need to say "I" because I was the one who wanted to push the spread of narrative ideas, and I could see there was a genuine interest in the facilitator community to spread the word too. I will add that it coincided with the 2nd Master Class that Michael taught in Montréal. I made it a point to create a collaborative workshop gathering Peggy Sax and David Parré too. Unfortunately, in 2012, all came to an end with the closure of our centre and the health issues that fell upon me.

Back to 2005 and the European adventure when I met with Michael White in Paris. As you already know, NT had found its audience. It seemed like Paroles d'Enfants had even developed an addiction to it! They loved the practice of NT as well as the ethics which go along with it, and asked me to come back over and over again to facilitate workshops for them. From 2007 to 2015, depending on the year, workshops were delivered in Liège, Lausanne and Paris. The themes we developed had widened: introduction to NT, advanced NT, trauma and loss, etc. In 2009 and 2011 Parole d'Enfants invited me to their AGM held at UNESCO - the same AGM you will be a guest speaker to, this coming December - they invited me to their 2011 and 2014 annual meeting in Liège too. As you can imagine, there are many professionals who have integrated NT in their practices and are now practitioners in their little corner of Francophone countries.

I suspect that you already know about my encounter with Rodolphe. You might have to double check with him, but I think that Rodolphe came to the first workshop I facilitated in Lausanne in 2007. A few years later, he came again and attended the advanced training. If I am not mistaken, Rodolphe invited me to Geneva for the first time in 2011 on the occasion of the Certificate of Narrative Therapy.

Dear Charlie... I can only imagine how overwhelmed you might be right now, considering all the details I have off loaded on you! I am hoping that these details will help you weave a story without too many difficulties. Maybe it will encourage you and the new generation of practitioners in Bordeaux, Switzerland and Belgium to keep spreading these powerful, dense ideas. I have no doubt there are many more realms of NPs to explore.

Books available in French

Translation work:

Denborouh, D., *L'Approche Narrative collective, quelles réponses apporter aux individus, aux groupes et aux communautés qui ont vécu un trauma ?* (original title : *Collective Narrative Practice*), 2008, French translation Catherine Mengelle 2014, 2018, Satas (2ème édition révisée).

Denborouh, D., *Au-delà de la prison, recueillir des rêves de liberté* (original title: *Beyond the Prison, Gathering Dreams of Freedom*), 1996, French translation Fabrice Aimetti 2019, éd. de la Fabrique Narrative.



Epston, D., Cas pratiques, cliniques et poétiques en thérapie narrative (original title: Down Under & Up Over), 2008, collective French translation 2012, coordination Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun and Catherine Mengelle, Satas.

Morgan, A., Qu'est-ce que l'Approche Narrative ? (original title : What is Narrative Therapy? An Easy- to-read Introduction), 2000, French translation Catherine Mengelle 2010, 2015, InterEditions (revised 2nd edition).

White, M., Cartes des Pratiques Narratives (original title: Maps of Narrative Practice), 2007, French translation directed by Isabelle Laplante and Nicolas de Beer 2009, Satas.

White, M., Epston, D., Les moyens narratifs au service de la thérapie (original title: Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends), 1990, French translation Jean-François Bourse 2003, Satas.

Many translations of major articles to be retrieved from the Fabrique Narrative website (wikispace).

French Publications:

Bernard, N., La Poésie contre le burn-out, reconstruire la dignité au travail avec les Pratiques Narratives, 2018, Publibook .

Blanc-Sahnoun, P., L'art de coacher, méthodes, cas pratiques et outils, InterEditions, 2006, 2010, 2014, chapitre 10 : Qu'est-ce que l'Approche Narrative change au coaching ?.

Blanc-Sahnoun, P., Galliano, T., Chômage des seniors, une autre histoire possible : l'Approche Narrative pour reconstruire la fierté, 2018. L'Harmattan.

Mengelle, C., Comment aider son ado à trouver sa voie, 2018. Mango.

Ostermann, G., Les thérapies narratives, revue Diabète & Obésité, février 2017, vol. 12. n° 105 Retrieve [Here](#).

Scherrer, D., Échec scolaire, une autre histoire possible, le coaching au service des jeunes en difficulté, 2011, L'Harmattan.

Scherrer, D., Accompagner avec l'Arbre de vie, Une pratique narrative pour restaurer l'estime de soi, 2018, InterEditions.

Soulinac, R., Planches narratives, Redevenir auteur de sa vie de couple, aider les couples, les groupes et les professionnels, 2015, Chronique Sociale.





Soulinac, R., Planches narratives, Redevenir auteur de sa vie professionnelle, Aider à guérir de la démoralisation au travail, 2016, Chronique Sociale.

Crettenand, C. & Soulinac, R. (2014), Le deuil : trop ou trop peu d'appartenance(s) : Perspective de l'approche narrative, *Thérapie Familiale*, vol. 35(4), 429-437.

Crettenand, C. (2018), Enchanter nos pratiques : L'approche narrative avec les enfants, *Thérapie Familiale*, vol. 39(4), 355-373.

Collection of texts published in French (many authors):

Dire bonjour à nouveau - L'Approche Narrative pour les personnes, les familles en deuil, 2018, Satas, coordination Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun et Catherine Mengelle.

Les pratiques de l'Approche Narrative, 2017, Satas, coordination Pierre Blanc-Sahnoun.

Pistes narratives, Pour faire face au sentiment d'échec personnel et professionnel, 2011, Hermann, coordination Catherine Besnard-Péron et Béatrice Dameron.

Books being written at present:

Mengelle, C., Découvrir les Pratiques Narratives (titre non définitif), 2020.

Dunod Crettenand, C., Soulinac, R., Eupsychologie et thérapie narrative pour dépathologiser l'existence, 2020, Chronique sociale.