Journal of Contemporary Narrative Therapy

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Foreword: Dear Reader

Welcome to this special edition of the Journal of Contemporary Narrative Therapy written by colleagues at DISPUK—Danish Institute for Supervision, Teaching, Organizational and Individual Counseling and Therapy—in Denmark.

We are honored and thrilled to share with you some of our work around documentation and letter writing. Before we set off, we would like to thank David Epston and Tom Stone Carlson for inviting us to do this special issue.

The issue began with a question David posed to Camilla Schjørring about writing an article and soon grew into an enthusiastic exchange of ideas at DISPUK, with seven of us ultimately contributing to this issue.

And it has been fun. Not just because it gave us an opportunity to work together on this project, but because we are all fascinated by the effects documenting and writing have had on our work over the years.

And because we love language! This powerful tool we hold has the strength to create, form, and re-form stories. We love that humans found a way to preserve language. We learned to write. Socrates was a bit concerned about the effects of the written language. He worried that it might fail our memory, because the written language, once it is written, parts from the experience floats around not as memory, but only as reminders of what we have experienced. We tend to agree. The written language fails to capture the nuances of a memory.

So how come we love to write? We love to write because writing is also creation. Writing is an opening opportunity. When we write, we create images, stories, identities, thoughts, even emotions. And every creation holds the power to affect the world. This can be scary, but it also provides hope. We can participate in

making changes through our language. And we can hold on to those transformative creations through our writings. Maybe we are not just human beings but human becomings, to paraphrase the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze.

This love for language and story development has been at the heart of DISPUK's work over the past 35 years. Standing on the shoulders of Michael White and David Epston's work, we have continued exploring how narrative and poststructuralist ideas can be brought to life in creative ways. In this issue, you will have the opportunity to join me and some of my colleagues at DISPUK in our exploration of the possibilities that written language offers in developing helpful practices to support the collaborative work we do with the people who consult us.

In Tine Mølgaard's text, she mentions narrative practice as a political practice. DISPUK has a long history of applying a narrative framework within leadership/management, therapy, pedagogy, supervision, teaching, and other trades where a critique of the power of dominant discourse is relevant (that's basically everywhere). This is because we believe narrative ideas to be helpful in a broader context, and because some of the stories we meet in therapy are the result of harmful structural practices in our culture.

Sometimes, what leaders, social workers, teachers, and others do in the process of reproducing culture—often without that being their intention—can have harmful effects. We want to help change that. This issue is inspired by that work.

We all teach, supervise, and practice therapy close to the practices and thoughts presented by Michael White, but we believe that any theory or related practice must consider the broader cultural context and power structures when it is practiced.

You will find examples closer to "classic" narrative therapy, but you will also get an opportunity to read about practices that we do outside the context of therapy.

You will get a chance to read about:

Invitations: Shortcuts to a Relational Narrative Practice. In this article, Martin Nevers, CEO at DISPUK, shares his experiences and perspectives on invitations as an important first relational step in therapy.

For Me, Starting a Conversation Without a Letter Feels Like I'm Only Half a Therapist. In this article, Camilla Schjørring shares her reflections on five letters following five different sessions and their impact during a six-month process of therapy with a young couple. She concludes the article with six points to consider for therapists who want to get started with writing narrative letters.

A Pine Says Thank You: On Finding Agency in Relationships with Places. In this article, Lasse Hauge explores how, in narrative practice, we often associate re-membering with human relationships. But Michael White reminded us that places, too, can be members of our life stories. Through practices like brief therapeutic letter writing, these relationships can be given voice.

"What Are You All Meeting About Now?"—A Story About an Angry Voice, a Supervision Room, and a Magic Pen. In this article, Lisette Valter, then working as a psychology supervisor at a residential facility in social psychiatry, draws on a fairy-tale–inspired supervision session held with a resident. The article explores how poetic rendering can open space for multiple voices and new possibilities.

How Journalists Can Tell Stories Without Making Sources More Vulnerable. In this article, Olivia Nepper Winther explores how journalists can tell important stories without leaving sources more vulnerable than before. She reflects on the need for new ethical practices when working with people in vulnerable positions and introduces outsider witnessing letters as a concrete method to support sources after interviews.

How a Letter Can Enlarge the Small 'p' in 'politics'. In this article, Tine Mølgaard explores how a letter can expand the small 'p' in politics into something much bigger. She reflects on a rebellious letter-writing practice—created together with her colleague—that began as a response to inadequate structures in schools and daycares and grew into something with a capital 'P'.

Writing Letters as Therapy. In this article, Lone Kaae Morell demonstrates how writing (and exchanging) letters is not merely a method, but an ethical and political practice. Lone shares a five-week therapeutic process in a letter exchange with a woman.

Afterword: What Is the Spirit of Narrative Practice? In this afterword, Lasse Offenberg reflects on the spirit of narrative practice as it appears across the seven articles in this special issue of JCNT. He explores what unites these written practices and the assumptions about people that underlie them. Drawing on Hilde Lindemann Nelson's concept of morally degrading identities, he examines how narrative practice resists such identities in everyday life. Instead, he highlights how these practices insist on seeing people as moral agents.

We hope these articles will inspire you and perhaps open up new thoughts, perspectives, practices, conversations, and not least new ways of working with writing.

Greetings from Denmark,

All of us in DISPUK