Using Narrative Practices to develop preferred stories about stuttering

Antwerp 2014
Overview

- Brief introduction to Narrative Therapy (NT)
- Double listening/Absent but implicit
- Practise these skills with written sample statements from CWS & AWS
- Be outsider witnesses to PWS’s story
- Write feedback to this PWS - document
Practicise “double listening” – hear more than the problem story

Learn to identify what is “absent but implicit”

Entry points to the alternative story

Ways of “thickening” this story
Knowledge and understanding of the basic principles and processes of NT

Skills in identifying an alternative story through “double listening”

Knowledge and skills in being able to hear the “absent but implicit” aspects of a problem story.
Skills in finding an entry point into an alternative story

Skills in being able to establish an alternative story and in “thickening” it

Knowledge of “definitional ceremonies”

Skills in being an “outsider witness”
Narrative Therapy

- Counselling approach
- Developed in Australia in 1980’s.
- Michael White & David Epston published *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (1990)
Stories

- Way of interpreting and giving meaning to life
- People usually come to therapy with problem based story
- NT identifies dominant problem based story
- Finds entry points into other stories – unique outcomes, sparkling moments
PWS’ stories

- Problem based story
- May be about avoidance, restriction, tension
- Not fit with their hopes, dreams and ambitions
- Not reflect their preferred identity
- HOWEVER, these same PWS have other stories which do fit with their hopes, dreams, ambitions and preferred identity
Externalisation and Re-authoring

- Therapist helps PWS identify problem story and to separate the person from the problem – **Externalization**
- Helps PWS identify other neglected stories which are preferred
- Establish this **re-authored**, preferred story so that it becomes the dominant story
Thickening the preferred story

Two ways of doing this are

- Double listening to identify the “absent but implicit”
- Use of definitional ceremonies and outsider witnesses
Double listening involves listening for

- The dominant problem story

And at the same time for

- Other preferred stories/unique outcomes
Double Listening

- PWS says “my speech is worse than ever now”
- If double listening, what do you hear that is absent but implicit in this statement?

- Speech has been better for them before
- Response? – e.g. “tell me about a previous time when it was not so bad”
Absent but implicit

RT: ‘I don't want to go backwards again’

What does this indicate about his hopes and fears?
- Fear of regression
- Hope of moving forward

Therapist’s response: “It has gone backwards before but you moved forward from that, can you tell me about that?”

- What a person fears or despairs against points to what they hope for
RT: ‘Stutter had taken control and couldn’t concentrate

Fears and hopes? Possible responses?
Double listening gives the person a place to stand not just passive recipients
- Notices their agency
- Leads to agency
- Connects action with sense: meaning making
Therapists position

- Transparent
- Culturally Visible
- Acknowledging and dismantling the hierarchies of power that feature in therapeutic relationships
Definitional Ceremonies

- The telling of significant life story by the person at the centre of Definitional Ceremony

- Re-telling of the story by the people invited to be Outsider Witnesses

- Re-telling of the Outsider Witnesses' re-telling by the person at the centre of DC

Distinct and relatively formal movement between each

White (2007)
Outsider Witnesses respond to these stories with retellings that are shaped by a specific tradition of acknowledgement.

Interviewed along four categories of inquiry:

- Expressions
- Image
- Resonance
- Transport

(White, 2007)
Four categories of response

- **Expression**: audience asked to identify what they were most drawn to/captured their imagination

- **Images**: or mental pictures evoked by expressions and what this reflects about person

- **Resonances**: personal experiences that expressions touched on

- **Transport**: where expressions had taken them to in their thoughts where they might

(White, 2007)
Witnesses’ responses

- Not shaped by contemporary practices of applause
- Not about the usual way of responding
- Not about making declarations about other people’s lives
- Not about holding up their own lives as examples
PWS aged 36

Since Feb 2012 seen for

• weekly therapy Feb/March 2012
• intensive week April 2012
• and since Oct 2013 further weekly therapy
Ensure respectful, collaborative, accountable and transparent ways of working’ (Stevens, 2010: 46)

Endure: bear witness to the work of therapy (Epson)

Record Knowledge in the Making (Epson, 1999)

Provide support for others (Pentecost, 1998)

Archives of Resistance (Anorexia)

Conversations carried out on paper (Pentecost, 1998)
Documents

- Supplement the face–to-face sessions
- Permanent record of key moments.
- Tangible and can be re-read.
- Acknowledge achievements.
- Can give a sense of history.
- Thicken stories and lend more authority to the stories being told.
- A life-line to the self
- Opportunity for reflection on session, consider possibilities not immediately obvious in session.
Staying true to the exact words used by a client privileges their viewpoint and can be the only record of their point of view in an official file (David Epston 1998)
I know I replied briefly to your email last week about your study, but since then I have had a few thoughts and a few questions that I hoped you might consider before …

At the last review day, you were at the centre of a definitional ceremony and one word really struck me; you spoke of having a ‘spark’. I wondered if there was anyone in your life, past or present that identified that ‘spark’ in you?

Fiona
Hi Fiona..

The spark is me I have realised… I think a lot of people would be happy that I am changing things, but they lost patience with me. So I keep my goals to my self now…

I will write more about people who could identify the spark again and if I come up with more stories, I'll put them down too.
Contact Details

- Mary O’Dwyer (odwyermp@tcd.ie)
- Fiona Ryan (ryanf8@tcd.ie)
- Margaret Leahy (MLEAHY@tcd.ie)


References