Separating the problem and the person: insights from Narrative Therapy

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The Story so far …

• Wanted to change way we work with People Who Stutter (PWS)
• Listen and learn from PWS
• Experience of Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Psychology
• Value PWS’ expertise
• Collaboration

Story so far….

• Some knowledge of Narrative Therapy (NT) being applied with PWS
  – Logan (2006)
  – Manning (2010)
• Free To Stutter….Free To Speak in 2009
• Accessible to Speech & Language Therapists

Our Experience

• Initial application to deeper understanding
• Fits well with Stuttering Modification and Avoidance Reduction Therapy
• Behaviours and meaning/ hopes/dreams/ ambitions/identity
• Sense of agency
Our Experience

• Addresses the complex nature of stuttering.

• PWS develop understandings that lead to acceptance (McCormack 2011).

• Simple at one level…. Rich and complex

Overview

• Brief introduction to Narrative Therapy
• Explain externalising conversations
• Give examples from child who stutters
• Map externalising conversation with 18 year old PWS
• Specific language or terms/jargon

What is Narrative Therapy?

• An approach to counselling and community work
• Developed by White & Epston (1990)
• Centres people as the experts in their own lives
• Views problems as separate from people
• Assumes people have many skills, strengths, values

Narrative Therapy

• Begin with dominant, problem saturated narrative
• Externalise the problem, give it a name, draw it, avoid totalising
• Look for unique outcomes, sparkling moments as entry points into alternative narrative
• Highlight strengths and resources
• Re-author

(White 2007)
**Externalisation**

- "This is the process by which we separate the person’s identity from the problem for which they seek assistance" Morgan (2000, 17)
- Objectifies it
- Experience an identity that is separate from the problem
- Naming: the name for the problem comes from the client
- The problem is the problem ….. Not the person

**Purpose of Externalising Conversations**

- Separate the problem from the person
- Position the person as expert on the problem- through rich/detailed description
- Place problem in time & other context
- Allow for acknowledgement of effects
- Enable the person to position themselves outside and in opposition to the problem
- Relate this to wider values/ hopes and dreams

**Steps in an externalising conversation**

- Recent and particular experience of the problem – Naming and describing the problem
- Describing the effects of the problem’s activities across various domains
- Evaluating the effects of the problem’s activities
- Justifying the evaluation

**Cormac**

- Nine year old boy
- Referred last spring for therapy
- Onset at reportedly seven and a half/eight years of age
- Attended group summer 2011
- Came for review following difficulties in school in December 2011
Questions to aid externalising

**NAMING**

Mr Angry

Questions to aid externalising

**EFFECTS OF THE PROBLEM**

The effects of Mr. Angry

- He is mean, because he makes me stutter
- Makes my tongue stick out
- Makes me block
- Makes me get nervous before talking
Effects of Mr. Angry in school

- Tries to make fun of me
- I know the answer but I don’t want to say it
- I put in the wrong answer so I don’t get stuck
- Sometimes act like I am thinking then when I am ready to say it I say it
- In the yard I don’t do it all because I am not worried about him, just concentrating about what I am playing

Questions to aid externalising

Taking a POSITION on the problem

Cormac’s Position on Mr. Angry

- I feel angry at him
- I hate him
- I want to make him the size of a peanut
- I want to give him ‘some heat’

Questions to aid externalising

JUSTIFYING THE POSITION
Cormac’s Justification

- I want to say what I have to say even if I get stuck
- I like to talk

Statement of Position Map 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOPES/VALUES</th>
<th>WHY?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want to say what I have to say even if I get stuck</td>
<td>I feel angry at him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to talk</td>
<td>I hate him</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFECTS/across</th>
<th>DOMAINS OF LIVING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makes me get nervous before talking</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| POSITION - WHERE DO YOU STAND ON THIS? | |
|---------------------------------------| |
| I feel angry at him | |
| I hate him | |

| CHARACTERISATION OF PROBLEM/CHALLENGE | |
|---------------------------------------| |
| Mr Angry | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>(Based on White 2007)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 year old girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has had stuttering therapy since 10</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>At 12 became very self conscious and covert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family tragedy- no therapy for almost 3 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Returned aged 17 on Father’s request</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Externalisation Conversation
Took place during therapy
• On return from visit to cousins
• Had not talked to cousins' friends who had visited
• Viewed this as a problem as would have liked to talk

Statement of Position Map 1

HOPES/VALUES
WHY?

POSITION - WHERE DO YOU STAND ON THIS?

EFFECTS ACROSS DOMAINS OF LIVING

CHARACTERISATION OF PROBLEM
Awkward Turtle – leader: Feel frozen, fear, anger.
Avoidance tags along

TIME

(Based on White 2007)
**Statement of Position Map 1**

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<th>HOPES/VALUES</th>
<th>WHY?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being more comfortable in who I am. Going to college.</td>
<td>Going up to people and telling them who I am. Doing presentations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**POSITION - WHERE DO YOU WANT IT TO SHRINK IT - A LOT - THREE QUARTERS.**

**YOU STAND ON THIS?**

**EFFECTS ACROSS DOMAINS OF LIVING**

Not expressing who I am, being quiet & shy. Holding me back.

**CHARACTERISATION OF PROBLEM/NAMING**

Awkward Turtle - leader: Feel frozen, fear, anger.

**TIME**

Take Home Points

- Collaboration with PWS
- The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem
- Centre the individual knowledges/personal stories of PWS
- Externalisation and Re-Authoring are key processes in NT

**References**


