COUNSELING AND STUDENT CULTURES

# Re-authoring Teaching:

## CREATING A

## COLLABORATORY

Peggy Sax

SensePublishers

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*Creating a Collaboratory*

Peggy Sax
*Middlebury, Vermont, USA*

SENSE PUBLISHERS
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This book is dedicated to Michael White, whose death just as this book was going to press was a terrible shock to me. His wisdom and counsel over the years reverberate throughout my writing. When I turned to Michael as I was struggling with an earlier draft, he advised me to write in my own voice. I hope that I have been true to these words. Thank you, Michael, for everything.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peggy Sax, PhD, is in independent practice in Middlebury, Vermont, USA, as a licensed psychologist, consultant, workshop presenter and university instructor. An enthusiastic teacher, Peggy feels privileged for opportunities to share powerful stories of learnings from over 30 years of work with families and their children, teens, adults, couples, communities and students of all ages.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I began writing these acknowledgements while eagerly awaiting the birth of my first grandchild. It seems that not so long ago, I was the one in labor. And I was the practitioner-in-training, beginning my apprenticeship to human services. With a blink of the eyes, I have skipped into an older generation. Writing this book marks a new step on this journey. Many people and fortuitous events have paved the way. It is with a heart of gratefulness that I write these acknowledgements.

Over 100 people contributed to this book, traversing roles of teacher, student, client, guest visitor and manuscript reviewer. I strived to write a book reflective of the values that guide my work as a practitioner and teacher – to convey how much I learn from the people who consult with me and who are my students. Together, we illustrate how the designated roles of teacher, student and client all take turns learning from each other. I believe these multiple perspectives are at the heart of what makes this book special.

I cannot imagine having written this book without the help of my friend and mentor, David Epston. Through email communication, David has made himself completely available to me. He found me a publisher, reviewed my drafts and wrote the foreword. Through his enthusiasm for the manuscript, he connected me with people in various parts of the world. At my request, he shared draft chapters with his partner, Ann, and together they conveyed their enthusiastic support. I am deeply grateful to both of them.

I had always heard that writing is a lonely endeavor. While I certainly experienced some isolation, I also found a powerfully sustaining sense of connection with the people that joined me in this effort. Often I acted as a facilitator within a web of connection – bringing together contributors' unique voices with guiding principles parallel to the construction of a "learning collaboratory," (I explain the word "collaboratory" in Chapter One). I then worked to shape a structure that would allow people to speak for themselves. Incredible energy and generosity of spirit carried this labor of love through multiple revisions.

I spent many weekends writing in indoor solitude, withdrawing from companionship and outdoor splendors. I lost close touch with dear friends, family and my community. I am especially grateful to my husband, Shel Sax, for sticking by me through this project. He has been most impacted by my myopic illusion that this book is the Center of the Universe. Now, as I aim to return to a more balanced life, I hope my friends will welcome me back, and forgive me for my absence.

I once heard the author Isabel Allende respond to a question about how she got so much done. "I have the gift of insomnia" was her reply. I too have this "gift"; I relied heavily on early morning risings and stolen evening hours to get this project done. While writing and revising, I have watched sunrises over the Green Mountains from my home office window, early mists rising on the St. Lawrence

River from Monica Behan and Deron Johnson's island retreat, ocean views from across the harbor on the coast of Maine, and sunsets from the porch of friend Alex Wylie's Lake Champlain cottage. While traveling with my laptop, I also worked in airports, anonymous hotel rooms and coffee shops.

I am a fan of Helen Keller, who said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." I could not have completed this book without the people who lent their voices to this project. I strived to do justice to what students, clients and guest visitors have shared with me. So many people have generously contributed that I fear I will either forget to acknowledge someone or incorrectly convey their words or their meaning. If I have in any way misrepresented anyone's voice, please let me know.

Helen Keller also said, "Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it." The people in this book shared intimate tales of their efforts to overcome suffering so we can learn from their experiences. I am particularly grateful to Alan, Josie, Mylo, Kate, Nicole, Chava, Ruth, Leah, and Meghan. I have also borrowed voices from my dissertation research project – those of Pamela, Isabelle, Lori, Pru, and Pam – mothers of children with special needs, who generously share some hard-earned wisdom in the search for "finding common ground" with human service providers and planners. There is no way I could put into words what I have learned from all of you and how you inspire me in my daily life.

I greatly appreciate the students who graciously allowed me to include their work in this book. Tracking down students was no small feat, and I was aided by several students and alumni offices. Mohammad Arefina (Smith) and Ellen Williams (University of Vermont) truly extended themselves to help me email addresses, as did Ken Bechtel from the UVM Social Work Department, Pat Gilbert from the Smith Alumni Office, and Tim Etchells from the Middlebury College Alumni Office. With former students' permission, I borrowed archived material from course websites from the UVM Social Work Department (WebCT), Smith College School of Social Work (Blackboard) and Middlebury College Psychology Department (Seque). Getting back in touch with these students was so invigorating for me. I hope that seeing their words in published form will deepen their understanding as to why I (and others) learn so much from them. This book is a celebration of what we have created together.

As I describe in Chapter Six, "Peopling the Course," a number of invited guests have generously contributed to my courses at Smith, University of Vermont and Middlebury College. People drove long distances to come to my classes; their presence has invaluably informed this book's teaching and learning experiences. Other guests have engaged with students online. Guest visitors have included: Chris Beels, Chris Behan, Stephen Bradley, Betsy Buckley, Pam Doyle, Phil Decter, Jonathan Diamond, Lynn Hoffman, Peter Lebenbaum, Lee Monro, David Paré, Prudence Peace, Beth Prullage, Marc Werner-Gavrin and Jo Viljoen.

Throughout, I cite skillful teachers for ideas and practices in this book. Yet something falls short when my name becomes associated with collectively created material. As teachers, I greatly appreciate the spirit of generosity with which many

colleagues share our teaching practices with each other. For me, this exchange began in 2002 with the formation of the Northern New England teaching group – Chris Behan, Betsy Buckley, Phil Decter and Steven Gilbert. I knew I could rely on anyone of them whenever I needed inspiration, problem solving or test piloting a new exercise. Behind the scenes, David Epston has given me invaluable guidance and support through teaching dilemmas.

I am particularly grateful to Dean Lobovits, Rick Maisel and Jenny Freeman for their article "Public Practices: An ethic of circulation" (Lobovits, 1995) that greatly informed my approach to therapy and teaching. The teaching faculty of the Dulwich Centre – Maggie Carey, Sue Mann, Shona Russell and Michael White—have given me many ideas for teaching narrative therapy. I have also been inspired by Cheryl White and David Denborough's creative talents, their organization of exceptional international gatherings, and their commitment to community practice. Others – Aileen Cheshire, Gene Combs, Jill Freedman, Dorothea Lewis, Bill Madsen, Wally McKenzie, Marilyn O'Neill, Sallyann Roth and Gaye Stockell – have influenced the development of specific exercises in this book.

David Epston likened my writing process to that of a carpenter building a piece of furniture – "sanding" through multiple drafts until the grain of the writing appears. I greatly admire Lynn Hoffman's writing, and was relieved when she told me she always does multiple drafts. My uncle and cousin, Lou and Roger Lowenstein are both authors. When I was immersed in redrafts, my Uncle Lou reminded me, "A book gets finished many times." And Roger attributed to Hemmingway, "An author publishes to stop rewriting."

Anne Lezak deserves a heartfelt thank you for her skillful editing, which has hugely contributed to this manuscript. Her specific suggestions and our ensuing conversations sustained me through the multiple revisions. She challenged me to write more clearly and without jargon. When I needed additional editing help, Ikey Spear, Anne Geroski and Anne Wallace immediately came to my aid. Peter de Liefde, publisher and general manager of Sense Publishers, stuck with me through many email exchanges, until the quality of all aspects of the book matched my high standards for excellence.

Each reviewer respectfully gave suggestions from a different angle. Several students reviewed earlier drafts of this manuscript. I want to especially thank Mohammad Arefina, Piper Clyborne, Emma Gibbs, Sarah Marx, Elizabeth Parker, Bobbi Rood and Kerry Ann Shearman for their thoughtful review of draft chapters. I hope all see their influence on this final draft.

What a better world this would be if everyone had a friend like Chris Behan! Throughout several years of writing, Chris stayed in close touch with me – checking in to hear how the book was progressing, listening to details of recent developments and reviewing draft chapters. He lifted my spirits during writing retreats in Massachusetts, New York, New Hampshire and Maine.

I deeply appreciate additional colleagues, friends and family who generously extended themselves to thoughtfully review various drafts of this manuscript. Mary Brevda, Marta Campillo, Aileen Cheshire, Lynn Hoffman, Charley Lang, Bill Lax, Beth Prullage, and John Winslade all read the entire manuscript, despite

competing pressures for their time. Others read and positively reviewed specific draft chapters: Lyndall Bass, Betsy Buckley, Phil Decter, Edith Fierst, Sonya Fierst, André Grégoire, Sarah Hughes, Devon Jersild, Penny Leikin, Rick Maisel, Jack Mayer, Margaret Olson, Shel Sax, Margarita Tarragona, Penny Tims, Jo Vilgoen, Alex Wylie, and Robin Young. Still others – Laura Basili, Frances Hancock, Sara Hirst, Thomas Jackson, Chip Mayer, Bill Madsen, David Paré and Michael White – gave moral support by periodically checking in with me for progress reports.

Fortuitous events regularly conspired to help me shape the manuscript into what it became. For example, Shel Sax kept me supplied with current literature on educational technology, and through our conversations, rather serendipitously introduced me to the word "Collaboratory"; Shel also came up with "Reauthoring Teaching" for the book title, a clever twist to narrative therapy's "reauthoring conversations." During phone conversations, Charley Lang offered the chapter headings, "Opening the Online Lens" and "Intentional Witnessing." Bill Lax guided me to use the most up-to-date language for my "blended learning" approach to teaching with an interactive website. On an autumn walk, Devon Jersild gave me invaluable writing tips to make room for multiple voices including dissent. Lynn Hoffman continually reminded me to be careful about my language, move away from jargon and edit down my verbosity.

Aileen Cheshire's enthusiasm for the manuscript carried me through long hours of writing – if she found it useful, I knew it was good. My understanding of the relevance of the apprenticeship metaphor for training practitioners was jumpstarted by correspondence several years ago with David Espton, Frances Hancock and Jo Vilgoen. As an independent reviewer for SensePublishing, John Winslade gave both supportive comments, and the kind of insider tips that only another writer could give. Jack Mayer, a pediatrician, encouraged me to share several chapters with physicians, medical students and psychiatric residents. Ongoing conversations with my son Jordan Sax about his medical school training gave me an insider view of pressures on health care and human service practitioners in the 21st Century, and the complex ethical dilemmas that require attention in all practitioners' training.

What is it about New Zealand and New Zealanders that so moves me? While collecting "blurbs" for the back cover, I suddenly realized that I had asked several people from New Zealand – Aileen Cheshire, David Epston and John Winslade. When I asked David if he thought that might be a problem, he responded, "Actually, I believe the world doesn't have enough New Zealand influence. Maybe **that** is the problem." I wholeheartedly agree. In addition to these New Zealanders, I am grateful to Dorothea Lewis for organizing my workshop at Unitec, which infused me with delight; Ann Epston for her warm hospitality and inquisitive interest in my work; Frances Hancock for her gracious hospitality, and for inspiring me with her fighting spirit and keen intellect; Jill Kelly for her warmhearted approach to technological assistance to David Epston and the Family Therapy Centre; Kathie Crochet for welcoming me into her home and introducing me to her colleagues at University of Waikato; and Wally and Bev McKenzie for living by example, reminding me to remain true to my values.

Acts of generosity have touched me again and again while working on this manuscript. My attorney brothers, Fred and David Fierst, reviewed my book contract. Heidi Ploof directed me to a song, "Unwritten," by Natasha Beddingfield, to listen to while working, reminding me that we are the authors of our own stories and that every day brings the possibility to write a new chapter. Jordan Sax took my photograph for the back cover. My two best friends from high school, Lyndall Bass and Robin Young, were steadfast cheerleaders.

Others might be surprised to hear of their influence on this book. Over the years, I have been mentored by remarkable people whose ongoing presence in my inner life inspires my approach to my work. Each is like a beacon of light, guiding me in a particular direction. I am especially grateful to Dana Brynelsen, the Provincial Advisor to British Columbia Infant Development Programmes, for living by example, a fierce, steadfast commitment to children and families. As co-director of the Addison County Parent-Child Center, Cheryl Mitchell embodied innovative ways of working with families in challenging situations; she continues to inspire me with her steadfast commitment to eradicating poverty in Vermont, and especially in our local community. Both Carolyn Carey and Naomi Tannen shepherded me into the wonderfully vibrant world of community mental health. Peter Lebenbaum, my clinical supervisor at The Counseling Service of Addison County, further demonstrated respectful ways of working with families. Tom Andersen and Dario Lussardi introduced me to the reflecting team and collaborative approaches to family therapy. I learned a great deal about facilitation, community building, prevention and state government from my work in the 1990s with The Vermont Prevention Consultation Team – in particular, Bill Lofquist, Jack Pransky, Peter Perkins and Jane Vella. Through my work with the Learning Team for "Children Upstream Services" (CUPS) project, I experienced firsthand the creative energy and mutual respect that can emerge when a group of dedicated people (in this instance, all women) share leadership to design services consistent with a shared commitment to Vermont children, families and communities.

Through contact spanning 20 years, Lynn Hoffman's intellectual curiosity, intrigue with language, and feisty irreverence continue to inspire me. Two faculty at The Fielding Institute – Barnett Pearce and Peter Park – helped expand my understandings of collaborative approaches into work with communities and participatory research. I am very grateful to Michael White and David Epston, the co-founders of narrative therapy, for being continual sources of inspiration. Discovering their ideas and practices has had a pivotal influence on my thinking and work as a practitioner. What I learn watching each of their interviews with families is akin to what artists learn studying under a master painter. I am also grateful for our friendships, which have deepened my understandings of what is possible, and buoyed my self confidence.

I have always been drawn to strong women**,** and I would like to honor several women who may not realize their influence on me and my work. My mother, Edith Fierst, taught me to cultivate a passion for both family and work. I cherish my memories of enlightening and enlivening conversations with the Vermont-based group "The Venerable Mothers" – Mary Brevda, Hope Cannon, Darden Carr,

Randye Cohen, Sydney Crystal, Judy Davidson, Christine Dumont and Lee Monro – about bridging our personal and professional lives. I have been deeply inspired by my experiences of Melissa Elliott – as a presenter and humanitarian; seeing her in action has reinforced my commitment to living intentionally with lovingkindness, and taught me to honor and include the spiritual in my work. Sallyann Roth has shown me the power of conversation when coupling collaborative inquiry with thoughtful precision. I am inspired by Corky Becker's fierce commitment to her friendships, intellectual stimulation and to pursing her passions. My conversations with Shoshana Simons linger, reminding me to live life like an action research project with constant inquiry, on an edge of wonder. Through her embodiment of humility and astute intelligence, Brenda Bean inspires me to remember our shared commitment to improving systems of care for young children and their families in Vermont. Most recently, Leenah Joy inspires me daily with her wise, loving, and adventurous commitment to her spiritual life, despite daunting physical obstacles.

I would like to acknowledge additional copyrighted material in this book. Random House gave me permission to include in Chapter Fourteen, a favorite poem "To be of use" by Marge Piercy." Portions of Chapter Two, "Opening the Online Lens," originally appeared in Sax, P. (2003), "It takes an audience to solve a problem: Teaching narrative therapy online." New Zealand Social Work Review, XV(4), 21-29. An earlier version of Chapter Seven, "Stories of Identity," originally appeared in Sax, P. (2006) "Developing stories of identity as reflective practitioners," Journal of Systemic Therapies, Vol. 25, Issue 4, p. 59-72. Portions of Chapter Twelve, "Remember to ask," originally appeared in Sax, P. (2007) the Journal of Systemic Therapies, Finding Common Ground: Parents Speak out about Family Centered Practices. Vol. 26, Issue 3, p. 72-90.

For the photo on the book cover, I wanted to showcase the exquisite outdoor beauty of Vermont, my adopted home state. The landscape of changing seasons infuses our lives here with indescribable splendor, and creates a balance to the indoor world of educational technology. I envisioned a welcoming photo that takes the reader on a winding road into the colorful and mysterious open air. While spending a heavenly weekend cross-country skiing with friends Margaret Olson and Alex Wylie, we photographed every possible pose of winding Vermont roads in a winter landscape. When I later realized that not everyone finds inspiration in winter scenes, my attention turned to Vermont's deservedly famous fall foliage.

My artist friend, Lyndall Bass, encouraged me to find just the right photo for the cover. Searching the Internet, I fell in love with a photo by George Robinson. On his website, www.georgerobinson.com, George described how he took the photograph in Underhill, Vermont on an autumn morning, just as the fog was lifting. The original photograph was overexposed and of poor quality. However, he saved the chrome, and eventually computer technology (Photoshop) made it possible to capture the beauty of scene – the white birch tree offsetting the trees' true colors in a rising mist. I feel like this photo was made for this book. Every time I look at it, I find new meaning. With careful attention, it is indeed possible to use technology to enhance our quality of life. Even the raised flag on the mailbox reminds me of the now universal symbol for online communication "You've got mail!"

I am in awe of Kathy Milillo's talents as a graphic designer. Kathy's ability to express the tone of teaching experiences described in this book – warm, welcoming colors with room for multiple voices – has infused the book cover, marketing flyer and website.

While writing these acknowledgements, I learned of the death of a dear friend and cycling buddy, Mike Searle. A gifted therapist, conversationalist and philosopher of life, Mike spread wisdom and love everywhere and touched many lives. I would like to think that this book honors his spirit. Within the same 48 hours, my grandson, Nathan Michael Sax was born; he and his parents, Peter and Molly Sax, bring such indescribable joy to my life. I want to acknowledge the joy and sorrow in all of our lives.

Completing this book completes a circle. I am reminded of yet another Helen Keller quote, "When one door of happiness closes, another opens." Indeed, in completing this book project, I am already experiencing some new doors opening. I have started a website, www.reauthoringteaching.com, for readers to send reflections to any of the people who lent their stories to this book. I am talking with Dean Lobovits, David Epston and Suzanne Pregerson about linking this new website with www.narrativeapproaches. If there is sufficient interest, we envision developing a place in cyberspace for continuing this conversation – to learn from people who have been "to hell and back" about their experiences in overcoming serious problems and their tips for practitioners; to exchange ideas and practices about teaching collaborative therapies; to learn from each other about contributions of the online medium. If none of this yet makes sense (or even if it does), I think it's time to read the book. Enjoy!

# FOREWORD

## HOW I AM GOING TO RE-READ PEGGY'S BOOK

*David Epston*

As hard as I tried the first time to read this manuscript as an overseer, I found myself swept along with it. It was as if I were being carried along by a gentle current or outgoing tide. Where this was taking me, I did not entirely know, but I had no fear. Somehow or other I knew that I had boon travelling companions, even if we were very different ages or at different stages of our professional lives. Against my better judgment, I found myself falling in love with the people in this book. I was reminded of the mediaeval "scholares vagantes" (wandering scholars), with Peggy like a modern day tour guide whose itinerary was to have us travel from place to place, teacher to teacher, seeking wisdoms.

This had to do, in retrospect, with something so companionable about what was unfolding in my reading of the text. How often did I regret that many of the conversations had ended? How often did I find myself with an almost irresistible desire to join them by butting in? And how often did I anticipate what my companions would have come up with by way of their responses? In fact, I felt as if I had returned to the world of that young student appealing to Rainier Maria Rilke for instructions on how to become a poet like himself (Rilke, 1993):

> *You are so young, so much before all beginning, and I would like to beg you, dear sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in very foreign language. Do not search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything, live the questions now.*
>
> *Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet,*
> *From letter four, July 16, 1903*

I think I was falling in love again with the questions that I have lived and loved for so long. I suspect what Rilke may have been referring to here was that love associated with the amateur. I am thinking here of the original meaning of amateur – a lover of a subject who takes pleasure in what he or she is learning and not the more contemporary meaning of "lack of professional skill or expertise." Here many of the speakers seemed on the verge of invention or of thinking well beyond anything they might have considered before. They seemed gifted amateurs to me, and their commentaries, I observed, continually referred back to that which mattered to them in living their professional lives.

I have been pursuing Peggy's experimenting with teaching narrative therapy by the means she details in this text for several years now, as have several of my colleagues (Dorothea Lewis, Aileen Cheshire and Kay Ingamells) at the School of

Community Development, UNITEC Institute of Technology here in Auckland, New Zealand). Like them, I have been intrigued by the obvious results of her pedagogy, blending classroom teaching with Internet "conversations." I have been continually asking myself, "How is it possible for such a community of students to engage in such profound considerations of the ethics, politics and practice of narrative therapy in a matter of weeks or months? Why were they seemingly able to integrate what they were learning into the missions for their professional lives and the problematics of their internships and former or future workplaces? What has the blending of classroom and Internet conversations got to do with this?"

I was reminded of many academic conversations over my years that by comparison had been so formulaic, so tendentious and even tedious that I would have been reluctant to join even if I were invited to do so. This led to me taking the *Selected Dialogues of Plato* (Plato, 2001) down from my bookshelf. I wondered if much of the genre of western philosophical inquiry and subsequent pedagogy could perhaps be traced back to those "dialogues" Plato told of between Socrates and his fellow conversationalists in which:

> *"..both parties must be willing to accept at any given moment that they are wrong, to find that their positions have reversed, or simply that they are left with no tenable position at all. What counts is the underlying loyalty and devotion to the quest for truth: this quest constitutes the closest approximation to truth or knowledge we can hope for."*
>
> "Introduction," *Selected Dialogues of Plato* (Pelliccia, 2001), p. xvii

I know on my second reading of Peggy's book, I will want to scrutinize the very means by which she co-evolved something so different than that. How had she shepherded such amiable conversations? I, nor doubtless any of the students involved, would suggest that such animated conversations came to pass merely by chance. Like any diligent shepherd, Peggy seemed to ensure that the conversations didn't stray so far as to risk getting lost as well as keeping the "flock" of conversations on the move, always seeking fresh pasture to avoid overgrazing. You may notice, reader, once you get carried away – and I certainly recommend you surrender to this your first reading through of this text – an insistent momentum, increasing week by week, meeting after meeting, and even one post after another. Once again, you may feel a strong sense of heading somewhere even if no final destination is known. Again, I doubt if this was accidental. Surely Peggy had something to do with this! But how was this sustained throughout each of her courses?

When I tried to find analogous conversations to those that were enthralling me on Peggy's various masters/bachelors courses, I was reminded of some, by now, almost lost arts: the scholar's diary and those correspondences undertaken by letter between life-long colleagues. Both of these genres had an intimacy, immediacy and humility about them, one written to oneself and the other to a like-minded person recording the journeys of their thinking, including of course that which troubled them. It seemed to me these genres privileged the inquiry itself over the conclusion that it finally reached in that they allowed the authors to show how they were

making up their minds – a kind of thinking out loud – about the matters that concerned them. In each instance, they left traces of the history of their thought in these texts and made little attempt at final conclusions or grand schemes. Many of those who went on to publish texts out of such conversations would expunge this record, almost as if to admit to the vicissitudes of their thinking was a sign of intellectual weakness. Their final texts were written almost as if its conclusion came first.

If I had the chance, I would ask Peggy, students and visitors, "In your studies so far, had you aspired to the Platonic quest for the truth? If so, at what point in this course did you abandon seeking such a truth for 'truths'? When did you start referencing your inquiries to what mattered to you in the living of your professional life? Can you name an actual point – 'X' – when you replaced the Platonic quest for what might prove to do justice to your moral and ethical commitments? Was there some sort of template underwriting how you went about this course?" If so, might my next reading scrutinize how the genre of "outsider witnessing" practices (White, 1995) flows into almost everything that followed, yielding some form of resolution? It seemed to me that so many of the conversationalists would reference their moral commitments as a significant vantage point for their considerations.

I recall my horror at reading one of the best studies undertaken so far on becoming a professional practitioner in one of the healing arts – *Of Two Minds: An Anthropologist Looks At American Psychiatry* by Tanya Luhrmann, Professor of Social Thought at the University of Chicago (Luhrmann, 2000). Reading this book helps us consider how various pedagogies have us come to "see" those whom we intend to serve. It is important to note that Luhrmann is not in any way a critic of psychiatry but an avowed sympathizer. During her ethnographic studies, she went through seven years herself of pseudo-training as a psychiatrist. She tells how she "knew I was coming to see people in a different way (p. 4)." She relates the circumstances that contrived to result in such a specific kind of "seeing" of the other. To quote: "Young psychiatrists leave an internship with a clear sense of the difference between patient and doctor – that patients are the source of physical exhaustion, danger and humiliation and that doctors are superior and authoritative by virtue of their role (p. 93)."

I would guess that the experiences of Peggy's students couldn't have been more dissimilar than those reported by Luhrmann. For that reason, I resolve in my next reading to query how these students came not only to see themselves as professional practitioners but even more significantly, how did they come to "see" those who will seek their service? Did the fact that so-called "patients/clients" and their voices made very strong and at times unforgettable appearances, either in person or in their texts (eg., through videotapes, writings, and responses in the outsider witnessing protocol) make them super-real? Unlike the disembodied and frequently de-grading accounts common to many professional descriptions, these "patients" stand on their dignity, "knowledged"[1] and justifiably acknowledged by those of us who are privy to their accounts of themselves.

Luhrmann's ethnography gave me pause to reflect: Under what conditions in which we "train" and work would our respect for those who petition for help be

inevitable? How could we develop intentional practices that might create and sustain mutual regard and the sense of community and solidarity that flows on from that?

Michael White, having accepted such an inspiration, makes a very good point:

> *And what of solidarity? I am thinking of a solidarity that is constructed by therapists who refuse to draw a sharp distinction between their lives and the lives of others, who refuse to marginalize those persons who seek help; by therapists who constantly confront the fact that if faced with the troubles of others, they just might not be doing nearly as well.* (White, 1993, p. 132).

My next set of enquiries has to do with what the Internet, and what it allows for, and has got to do with this. After all, I admit to a prejudice I had held against web-based learning of something as intimate and skill-based as any therapy practice. Perhaps this was based on what I knew of the manualization of courses so typical of the first generation of attempts at Internet pedagogies, some of which were abandoned as both unsuccessful and unsatisfactory.

However, is the Internet as a genre for pedagogies evolving through trial and error? After all, I have known for a long time that my most rewarding university conversations were after a class with a colleague over coffee or a beer when we both were at our ease, could speak without much concern for getting it right or wrong and could admit to our confusions. But such conversations are often ephemeral, lost to the ravages of time, and even if they remain, except for the very exceptional, they are not stored verbatim. What if a verbatim text could be electronically stored and retrieved at will? According to Alex Ross, writing in the *New Yorker* (Ross, 2007), "this is a voice that effectively could never have been heard before the advent of the Internet...it is sophisticated on the one hand, informal on the other, and immediate in impact." Could such a medium of Internet-based conversations yield a distinctive message?

I believe this could be so in some circumstances by allowing for the seemingly contradictory – scholarly rigor commingling with the unaffected enthusiasm and vivacity so characteristic of a "good conversation." There would seem to be a kind of electronic garrulity informed by what Schon (Schon, 1983) referred to as "reflection-on-action." Schon revealed that time itself is a prerequisite for a newcomer to reflect and that such time is available and can be taken in the conversations recorded here. Internet conversations do not discriminate against those who like to or require themselves to take time to think about what they are about to say and be able to reflect on it by reviewing the text of their emails – a second "thinking over their thinking," or a revised draft of it.

I have often wondered if Jerome Bruner's thoughts have any bearing here. I think they do. He refers to the French cultural psychologist Ignace Meyerson's contention that "the main function of all cultural activity is to produce 'works/oeuvres' as he called them works that, as it were, achieve an existence of their own" (Bruner, 2005, p. 22). Bruner refers to "externalizing," the benefits of which he considers to have been overlooked. These collective oeuvres "produce and sustain group solidarity. They help 'make' a community, and communities of

mutual learners are no exception (p. 22-23).” Such oeuvres yield a “metacognition” “and usually lead to lively discussion. Works and works-in-progress create ‘shared’ and ‘negotiable ways of thinking in a group.’” He borrows the term “mentalite” from the Annales school of history/sociology to indicate such styles of thinking, or each community having “a mind of its own.”

I recall many of Peggy’s students commenting that such conversations were unique so far in the course of their undergraduate and postgraduate studies. In my re-reading of Peggy’s book, whenever it is possible, I am going to try to observe how such a “mentalite” forms over time. I suspect I might be somewhat limited in doing so without the electronic records of conversations in their entirety or immersing myself in a similar electronically-documented conversation. But I will see what I can do in what here has necessarily been considerably abbreviated. Are the outsider witnessing practices, so integral to this training programme, implicated in the formation of any such “mentalite”?

Although I have left this to my last consideration, I consider it to be very important; how much bearing must be given to Peggy’s obvious exuberant love of the practice she teaches and learns, and her unashamed exulting in it? I suspect that has a great deal to do with students and readers becoming boon travelling companions, traveling from place to place, teacher to teacher, seeking wisdoms.

## NOTES

[1] Michael White invented the neologism “knowledged” to remind us there is a multiplicity of “knowledges” including “insider knowledges,” and that so-called “expert” or “outsider knowledges” do not hold a monopoly.

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# Section One: Re-authoring Teaching

CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

**Posting from Kerry1**

> *I loved that at any given time there were multiple threads to choose from. You could choose to join a conversation or simply start your own depending on what you were drawn to at the time. I think this really allowed each person to be engaged in what they were responding to and writing about rather than simply answering a standard set of questions. It also allowed us to dig in more with each other because there was a layer of safety in writing something down and not having to say it face-to-face. We had time to think about what people said and respond in a way that more accurately reflected our thoughts versus what first came to mind.*

## CREATING A LEARNING COLLABORATORY

The online medium has opened up vast new possibilities for sharing and learning that could be adapted by nearly any teacher, in almost any topic, but seems to be particularly suited for teaching narrative and other postmodern therapies. In fact, when I introduced the online aspect to my teaching, the interactive website became "the tail that wagged the dog." Rather than just being an interesting and somewhat useful adjunct, it has opened up entire new vistas of possibilities regarding interconnections, learning communities, bringing in multiple voices in addition to the teacher and student, and bridging the gap between teacher and students.

"Collaboratory" blends the two words collaboration and laboratory to convey an environment without walls where participants use computing and communication technologies to connect with a sense of discovery over a shared project. Most commonly, a collaboratory is an experimental and empirical research environment where scientists work and communicate with each other to collaboratively design systems, conduct experiments, and share research findings (Rosenberg, 1991). In this book, I extend the collaboratory metaphor to illustrate how the addition of a website can turn a course into a vital collaborative learning community that combines an ethic of confidentiality with an ethic of circulation (Lobovits, Maisel, & Freeman, 1995). I provide guidelines for online reflections that make it possible for the teacher to take a decentered position, structuring discussion that encourages students to engage with each other in refreshing conversation with emotional intensity more akin to friendship than classmate. This approach to teaching allows space for everyone, including the teacher, to share stories and speak candidly about their learnings and questions.

CHAPTER 1

The Internet is transforming possibilities for education. Colleagues have found enormous potential in teaching web-based courses where all communication takes place online. My personal experience is with constructing blended learning courses that combine face-to-face sessions and technology-based materials to deliver instruction (Bonk, Graham, & Cross, 2005; Heinze & Procter, 2004). While I use an interactive website to augment classroom teaching, I still believe the most powerful learning takes place through direct experience. Through storytelling, guest speakers and recorded interviews, students experience firsthand the spirit of inquiry and shared discovery that guide how I position myself in relation to people who consult with me. Students interact in person and online with people who have been in the client role, and who share stories about their preferences for more personal exchanges with service providers that do not hide behind a "professional" expert position. Together we participate in narrative interviews in which students practice speaking from a place of resonance and transport as outsider witnesses. I devote several chapters later in this book to describe the teaching stories, public practices, and intentional witnessing practices that are a cornerstone of my teaching.

My teaching has changed (and improved, I believe) in significant ways through using the online medium to augment classroom meetings and course readings. In lively classroom sessions, we discuss material, watch videos, practice interviewing, reflecting teamwork and narrative exercises, and meet with guest speakers. While these are all key pieces of the course, meeting online between classes at the course website offers an invigorating milieu for students and teacher to engage in frank and wholehearted conversation about course materials and experiences. This is reflected in their responses; most students overwhelmingly appreciate and express how much they have gained from this "new, improved" model of sharing and learning.

Most teaching guides are so far from students' actual experiences as to read like instructions in a manual. This book attempts to give readers a real sense of what happens in teaching situations where curiosity, wholeheartedness, and learning infuse the course. Archiving online reflections directly captures what students learn from guest speakers, recorded interviews, and storytelling, excerpts of which I share throughout the book. I provide examples from the classroom and the online class forums of how letters, reflecting teams, and archived websites provide public contexts for people to speak with knowledged[1] voices about life-shaping experiences in ways that significantly inform the lives of everyone involved.

Throughout this book, I strive to show how we "re-author" teaching from the concomitant roles of students and teacher. I give personal accounts of how students' responses energize and inspire me – as teacher, practitioner, author, and fellow traveler in life. I show a behind-the-scenes view of many effects of educational innovations on my thinking, teaching practices, and understandings of students' experiences. Together, students and I share experiences so memorable that we create what in some cases may well be lifelong bonds. Contacting students for permission to include their voices in this book, I was again reminded of the intensity of our connections, the genuineness of our exchanges, and of our care for

one another. I learn from them; their presence enhances the quality of my life. I do not know if this is common practice. This book shows what is possible.

Rather than surveying multiple approaches, my illustrations are specific to teaching narrative therapy. I made this choice because narrative therapy has had the greatest impact on my own thinking and practices as a family therapist. By giving an overview of some of the most "sparkling" developments in my own evolution as a practitioner (White, 1992), I hope to contribute to students' commitment to pursue their own enthusiasms through further studies and into their professional careers.

### *Webs of Connection*

I have always been intrigued by how people live and learn in complex webs of connection. I was fortunate to enter the field of family therapy just as a radical change was taking place – from a hierarchical to collaborative style of therapy (Andersen, 1987; Hoffman, 1993; McNamee & Gergen, 1992). My early home-based work with families of infants and toddlers with special developmental needs had ignited a passion for learning directly from and fiercely advocating for families (Bromwich, 1981; Brynelsen & Sax, 1980; Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988). I learned to see community-building as an important aspect of our work – to strengthen social support networks that can include, yet not center on, professionals (Dunst, Trivette, & Cross, 1988; Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, & Zigler, 1987; Schorr, 1997). Later, in my work as an organizational consultant, I was immediately drawn to the growing literature on creating and sustaining collaborative partnerships at work (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998) and building organizations based on a web of inclusion (Helgesen, 1995) I further describe the influence of these life experiences and others in Chapter Three, "Teaching Congruently."

It should come as no surprise that I seek in my teaching a similar congruence with collaborative ways of working. I take a relational stance in my teaching that strives for cultural curiosity, honors others' expertise and believes in possibilities and resourcefulness (Madsen, 2007b). I have been gratified to discover teaching colleagues with similar commitments[2]. Together, we have shared teaching ideas, practices, and dilemmas. Often a given exercise or course assignment goes through so many renditions, I lose track of to whom to give attribution. Wherever I have neglected to adequately give credit where credit is due, I hope I will be forgiven.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE

This book conveys an interactive process in which students and teacher become partners in learning and teaching. My intended audience is teachers and students at the graduate and undergraduate levels, in formal classes spanning the range of social work, counseling and psychology, as well as workshop and seminar leaders teaching in community settings. I believe other programs that train practitioners may also find guidance here. Teachers can draw from my experience in devising their own highly interactive courses. The multiple strategies I use reverberate with

students, create an engaged learning community, and facilitate new developments in students' thinking, approach to therapy, and even their worldview.

Originally, I envisioned writing this book solely for teachers of narrative therapy. However, I soon realized that my teaching approach applies to a wider readership. Postmodern therapies share an epistemological stance that questions expert knowledge and notions of "truth." The broad umbrella of postmodern critique (Anderson, 1997) includes three different yet overlapping traditions of family therapy: narrative therapy, collaborative language systems, and solution focused therapy. All attend to how knowledge and meaning are constructed in language and through relationship.

## BOOK CHAPTERS

I divide the book's fourteen chapters into three sections: 1) Re-authoring Teaching; 2) Multiple Voices; and 3) Practice, Practice, Practice.

### *Section One: Re-authoring Teaching*

In Chapter Two, "Opening the Online Lens," I describe in detail how I design a website for each course with an electronic syllabus providing an in-depth course description, links to online resources and materials on electronic reserve, and forums for discussion. I illustrate how the teacher provides the basic website structure and design, setting the stage for students to become active collaborators in co-authoring and co-editing evolving material. The online medium augments face-to-face classes to create a collaborative learning community facilitated, but not dominated by, the teacher.

Through a course website, students perform, witness, and reflect many times on each others' course assignments. I craft questions to draw forth their insider knowledge (White, 2004a). I strive to create an atmosphere in which no one is the expert and we are all learning together. This however does not, nor should it, deny a mentoring relationship between more and less seasoned practitioners. Often, this means getting out of the way so students can talk amongst themselves. Illustrations demonstrate how online pedagogy can be conducive to the ethics of collaboration and innovative circulation practices that are cornerstones of narrative therapy.

My goal as teacher is to model collaboration, transparency, and respect, and build on students' skills and knowledge. Chapter Three, "Teaching Congruently," gives a behind-the-scenes glimpse at how I work to make my choices as teacher as clear as possible. I describe influential developments in the fields of therapy, organizational development, teaching, and research that inform my striving for congruency in my teaching practices. I highlight concepts that influence my stance as a teacher and keep me honest in my exchanges with students: isomorphism**;** transparency; ethics of care; partnership accountability (Waldergrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka, & Campbell, 2003); and ethics without virtue (Welch, 1999). In the spirit of transparency, I give students more of a sense of me than the usual curriculum

vitae by situating my ideas and practices in the context of my own life experiences. I demonstrate how I give students a sense of the events and abiding realizations that guide my commitment to my work.

I believe my approach to teacher-student relations is internally consistent with how I train practitioners to address their positions of power in relation to the people who consult with them. I strive to model practices that minimize hierarchy without obscuring power-relations in psychotherapy and other human services; that value all knowledges[3] including insider and professional. In Chapter Four, "Reckoning with Power" I explore how I reckon with power in the classroom and online. I expose students to reading materials, exercises, assignments, and conversation regarding understanding power and using it well. Together, we challenge traditional myths about insider knowledge, and examine "professionalism." I illustrate a more transparent approach to power with a section on learning from my mistakes and experimenting with evaluation.

Students often describe feeling excited, stimulated, and overwhelmed as they first meet the ideas and practices of narrative therapy through video viewing, exercises, classroom and online discussion, guest speakers, and class readings. I assign readings about specific narrative practices, give students hands-on experiences with the practices they are studying, and start an online forum for students to reflect on their experiences. In Chapter Five, "When Nice is Not Enough," I share some candid student reflections and questions they have posted online as they grapple to understand how best to position themselves in relation to the people they aspire to serve. As practitioners-in-training, they feel the pressure to "get it right," struggling with self-doubt and self-surveillance. They exchange stories that convey confusion and disorientation as they question previously held assumptions. Students and I become partners in learning as we interact online about key concepts: the culture of applause, cheerleading practices, and the strengths perspective – always striving to make room for complexities.

*Section Two: Multiple Voices*

A course website makes it possible to archive students' ponderings, questions, and realizations as they engage with course materials. I include many student voices; their stories as much as mine bring this project to life. Through anecdote and personal reflection, I share my own teaching stories, many of which have been archived through my course websites. I aspire to follow the advice of my mentor, Lynn Hoffman, when I told her about my intention to fill this book with students' voices: "Take your writing out of the homespun sack of materials that fills up magically behind you. I like the edge of wonder – of 'what ever will come next?' If that's not there, the work dries up."

In my teaching, I incorporate others as "living" resources to me and the students. Throughout the book, I show how the online medium makes it possible for students to interact not only with each other, but with visitors to their course. A "guest pass" makes it possible for guest speakers, authors and virtual visitors to engage in online conversation with students on the course website. Guest speakers

come to class to speak from the perspective of the service seeker. Other guests visit the classroom and/or the course website to engage with students around their work as practitioners and authors. In Chapter Six, "Peopling the Course," I demonstrate how having guests join students in dialogue shifts and enriches experiences in the classroom and online. I give accounts of what becomes possible as well as what the teacher surrenders when choosing to instruct in this way.

I have discovered that students will go to far greater lengths to understand a concept or develop a practice when they have opportunities to apply it to the living of their own lives. In this book, I describe classroom exercises and online conversation through which students take up and live the actual ideas and practices they are studying. They develop a sense of a learning community as they share their reflections and assignments in class and online with one another. They apply their deconstructive listening skills to examine previously held assumptions about cheerleading and pointing out positives. In Chapter Seven, I offer the "Preferred Stories of Identity" assignment through which reflective practitioners directly experience the narrative practices they are studying. I share student's experiences as they learn the re-authoring conversations map that guides the interviewer to attend to expressions of initiatives in harmony with what a person holds precious (Thomas, 2002; White, 2004c, 2004e).

As a practitioner-teacher, I believe it is important not only to showcase the masters' work, but to share recordings of one's own. People who have come to consult with me graciously give me permission to share recordings of interviews, read aloud their poems, letters, and journal entries – anything that makes their stories come alive. I demonstrate in Chapter Eight, "Teaching Stories," ways in which people who have consulted with me bequeath to students compelling stories of their personal experiences in dealing with daunting challenges in their lives. I describe how I use class time to read aloud a riveting account of Kate's experience of "Hell & Back" - a descent into and recovery from a psychotic depression; I then show how I structure a letter-writing exchange between students and Kate. This chapter demonstrates the tremendous impact a story can have on students, who are moved both by the personal account and by the willingness of people to share their private struggles with such strangers.

Just as narrative therapy challenges assumptions about the absolute privacy of the client-therapist relationship, online learning challenges the academic tradition of prioritizing individualized confidentiality over community sharing. In this book, I demonstrate how innovative teaching practices can use therapeutic documents and "public practices" that incorporate audiences to consult with each other and with outside consultants around shared themes. In Chapter Nine, "Public Practices" (Lobovits et al., 1995), I share my strategies for practicing an ethic of circulation while still protecting privacy and allowing students to choose the extent to which they share their stories and personal reflections with others. I illustrate how I structure teaching environments that incorporate students as audiences to learn directly from guest speakers, recorded interviews and story-telling. In particular, I describe some of the far-reaching impact of one woman's story on students to illustrate the potency of public practices in teaching. Through journal entries,

poems, and letters, I introduce the reader to Nicole and her struggle to overcome anorexia, self-harm and depression; I include letters by students and workshop participants that convey how Nicole's candid accounts ripple into their lives, like echos, inspiring them to connect some of their own stories with hers.

*Section Three: Practice, Practice, Practice*

In each class, I give students time to hone the narrative skills I have introduced. Chapter Ten, "The Power of Intentional Witnessing," is illustrated with students' online conversations about in-class experiences with live interviews. I demonstrate how students participate as outsider witnesses in a moving interview with their own classmate, Mohammad. I also include a transcribed excerpt of an in-class interview with guest visitor Nicole, where students artfully participate in an outsider witness team. Throughout, I show how online forums give students opportunities to reflect, inquire, and build community as they explore possibilities and limits for personal sharing in outsider witness practices. I conclude the chapter with reflections and commentaries from Mohammad and Nicole about their experiences with being the focus of interviews with a reflecting team format.

Therapeutic letters are an aspect of narrative practice with a wealth of possibilities limited only by the imagination. In Chapter Eleven, "Teaching Letter - Writing Skills," I offer specific tips for letter-writing that use note-taking of direct quotes to enable letter writers to ask questions from a stance of earnest curiosity. I give three exemplary examples of preferred letter-writing practices from teaching and therapy situations. Through archived online reflections, I show how students give voice to such complexities as breaking through an internalized therapeutic gaze and speaking from their own voices, reflecting their own hard-earned wisdom**.** I describe how students practice their letter-writing skills in response to hearing insider accounts through guest speakers, in-class interviews, video-viewing, and storytelling. Students appreciate writing letters to someone real, not imagined, as this forces them to practice this skill knowing their letter will mean something to its intended reader. I provide a glimpse into the vibrant online conversation that each of these classroom experiences has generated as people with experience knowledge teach students invaluable lessons about how much ethical, useful practice means to them.

Chapter Twelve, "Remember to Ask the Cook," illustrates the learning and understanding that results from students consulting with experienced service seekers about their preferences regarding service provision. I share insider accounts I use in my classes that include tips for practitioners from the following people: parents of children with special needs; Alan, an adopted teenager who experienced foster care; and Meghan, a survivor of sexual abuse, family violence, psycho-pathologizing, and psychiatric maltreatment. Students write letters and/or participate in reflecting teamwork in response to these teaching stories.

Students often struggle to integrate their studies of narrative practice with other cherished learnings, and to adapt practices resonant with their own personal styles.

I want them to understand that the narrative approach does not come "naturally," as it is so different from the psychodynamic therapies that many of them have been studying (White, 2001). In Chapter Thirteen, "Apprenticing to a Craft**,"** I draw from archived correspondence and students' online discussion to give examples of how everyone, including the teacher, works on skill-building. Letter-writing assignments in the classroom and on the course website provide students additional opportunities to practice, critique, and revise their therapeutic documents. I illustrate with a "Take-Two" letter writing activity.

Finally, Chapter Fourteen, "Practice, Practice, Practice" explores how a teaching environment can encourage students to learn specific technical skills based on poststructuralist approaches in counseling while simultaneously developing their own unique ways of working. The possible applications extend well beyond the realm of psychotherapy to practitioners in a variety of community service contexts. I give an insider view of students' commitments to making differences in both the private and public sectors, and to moving beyond the isolated private world of therapy to join larger communities that share social justice concerns.

## BOOK FORMAT

I intend for this book to be reader-friendly and written in a collegial tone. I quote numerous online exchanges where students, myself, and guest visitors explore aspects of the history and culture of psychotherapy, grapple with provocative questions, and learn about narrative therapy. By including interactive material gathered from the course websites, I aim for a dialogical experience rather than drawing on a traditional monological text (Bakhtin, Emerson, & Holquist, 1990; Lysack, 2006). Throughout this book, I weave in my ongoing consultation with students to keep in touch with how their learning is proceeding and do my utmost to assist their progress.

### *Student Voices*

Students generously gave me permission to weave their voices throughout this book. I strive to capture the back and forth and zigzagging of online conversation by including reflections and postings in a consistent format. Single online postings are highlighted as follows:

**Posting by Kerry1**

> *Of course you may use anything I posted that you wish. I am flattered that I said something that may be helpful to someone else someday. This course has really been transformative for me and brought me to places I would not have gotten to on my own – at least not in this short period of time.*

I use pseudonyms for some students, while others prefer I use their real names. I distinguish between two students with the same name by using "Kerry1" and "Kerry2". Several students reviewed this manuscript and gave many useful

recommendations. They became my "co-researchers" in sharing their preferred ways of learning, reflecting on specific classroom, reading and online activities, and actively shaping the learning environment. In narrative practice, "co-research" refers to the process by which people inquire together to create original research about insider knowledges (Epston, 1999).

I offer students' behind-the-scenes accounts as they make discoveries and reflect upon unique realizations in applying narrative concepts and practices to their own lives and work contexts. Their reflections and questions make us partners in learning, deeply impacting the choices I make as teacher, and now as author.

### *Insider Knowledges*

As a practitioner, I carry a deeply held commitment to taking a position that does not privilege professional "expert" knowledge over client knowledge. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz is widely attributed for drawing the distinction between expert and local knowledge (Geertz, 1973, 1983). Professional expertise is knowledge that is written, published, and given cultural credibility; local knowledge is based on a person's knowledge that grows from her or his daily life. Local knowledge is synonymous with "insider knowledge" or "experience knowledge" (Walnum, 2007), the terms I most often use.

Throughout the book, I include powerful stories that people in the designated role of client have graciously shared with students through class visits, video recordings, and journal entries. People with "experience knowledge" have generously collaborated with me to review the chapters that include their stories. Together we have changed identifying information to protect their privacy. I believe their stories will enlighten you, the reader, as has been my experience and that of my students. With this book, their circle of influence widens and they become teachers for all of us[4].

In situations where these stories are from young people I worked with whose parents I got to know as well, I asked these young clients to invite their parents to join them in reviewing the manuscript and making choices about how to publicly tell stories that impact their family privacy. Through conversation, parents came to understand how important it felt to their children to speak out publicly so others could learn from their life experiences. Reviewing Chapter 8, Kate's mom described what "an emotional journey" it was to revisit from a parent's point of view her daughter's reflections on a descent into a psychotic depression at age 18. Still, she supported her daughter's choice to leave in some identifiable details: "Kate's ongoing concern to 'normalize' and almost publicize the mental health struggles that she and so many others have had to cope with is a frame of mind that I think our whole family honors."

Alan, who gives suggestions to social workers based on his experience being adopted from foster care as a young boy in Chapter 12, told me that using a pseudonym would symbolize that he was afraid to be who he really is. "I am proud to be who I am and nothing will ever change that." Through conversation, Alan's

parents learned how much this meant to their son and gave their support to Alan's position:

> *My parents thought at first that because I live a small town, word would jump around fast about my life story and they wanted to make sure that what I was doing was the right choice. I talked to them about it because I think that it would be better if the news travelled faster than slower so it would get to more people in a short amount of time and would be heard of as a boy who has advice as a person who had a hard early childhood and wanted to help out as many people as he could.*

Again and again, students demonstrate how much they learn from hearing life stories directly from the people who have lived them. Through their letters and online reflections, students also share ways in which these stories resonate with their own experiences and transport them to new understandings.

### *My Voice*

Writing this book has given me the opportunity to "show and tell" my approach to teaching. Throughout the writing process, I repeatedly faced my growing edge as a teacher and as a writer. I am more comfortable demonstrating than describing what I do and believe. In response to my reviewers' encouragement, I weave in my own voice, reflecting on how my teaching embodies the concepts and practices that I aspire to teach. In addition to bringing in multiple voices, I frequently return to my own voice, striving to ground each chapter in my experiences of teaching and witnessing this kind of learning. I reflect on my own edges of learning as I aspire to live the values and intentions that influence my chosen theoretical framework. I describe an interactive process in which I play the facilitator and guide – a process that strives to meet each student at her or his learning edge and has the flexibility to scaffold each person's learning from that point (Vygotsky, 1986). I try to show my thinking behind intentional choices, such as letting students know why I choose to incorporate many voices in the classroom. I explore the tensions of embracing a collaborative poststructuralist position within structuralist institutions and systems of care (Madsen, 2007c).

I openly position myself as a learner in the process. When I teach this way, I believe students are more likely to experience themselves as teachers, akin to how people who consult with therapists gain confidence in their own knowledge when they teach the therapist about what is most meaningful to them in particular life situations and relationships. Besides, I speak in earnest when I express how much I learn from my students.

Hence this book chronicles a personal journey of discovery in using blended learning methods to teach narrative therapy. My writing reflects a personal approach where I speak from my own experiences as teacher and practitioner. I do my utmost throughout the book to discern between this personal style and teaching rigorous practice skills. Every teacher must find her or his own unique teaching style; in this book, I show you mine.

## TEACHING NARRATIVE PRACTICE

### Posting by Bobbi

> *I have gained an intense awareness of the importance of asking questions that open the possibilities and knowing when to thicken the plot. There is an art to this. I try to take deep cleansing breaths and tell myself that I know this intuitively; then a nagging worry returns. Worry is interfering with my ability to feel comfortable with the practice. I am interested in slowing down and learning how to let others make connections for themselves and letting go of the pressure to be the expert "fix-it person." I was thinking here about listening as breathing...I am hopeful that the maps will provide me with some scaffolding about where and how to begin.*

A learning "collaboratory" is highly congruent with the focus and values of narrative therapy, where there is a priority and an ethical commitment to develop practices in which therapy is a reciprocal two-way process (White & Denborough, 2005; White, 1997c). The online interaction has proven a rich source of give-and-take that immeasurably deepens students' understanding of concepts and practices.

My narrative practice has been – and continues to be – inspired by excellent articles and texts on narrative therapy (Epston, 1998; Freedman & Combs, 1996a; Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; Morgan, 2000b; Payne, 2000; Russell & Carey, 2004; Smith & Nylund, 1997; White, 1997c, 2000b, 2004b, 2007d; White & Epston, 1990a). Thus far, the published literature on teaching narrative therapy is primarily in article and book chapter form (Jorniak & Paré, 2007; Lewis & Cheshire, 2007; Marsten & Howard, 2006; Mckenzie & Monk, 1997; White & Denborough, 2005; White, 1992; Winslade, 2003; Winslade, Crocket, Monk, & Drewery, 2000). I hope this book will further contribute to this growing literature and hence further legitimize teaching narrative practice in academic institutions.

Narrative therapy provides the conceptual framework to think in terms of people's lives as "storied," and of considering possibilities for giving new meaning to such experiences (White & Epston, 1990a). Therapists in narrative explorations adopt a position of inquiry guided by the craft and art of narrative interviewing to assist those seeking their services to explore their own ideas developed over the history of living their lives (White, 2007c). Narrative inquiry brings forth a person's specific and unique ways to approach life's difficulties, and to articulate what they intimately know about their own lives and relationships.

"Narrative practice" is a term that is replacing "narrative therapy," with many applications beyond the therapy room. Many students who work in public sector settings such as early childhood care and education, social services, and community mental health have readily adapted this change in language (Hancock & Epston, 2007). The narrative therapy literature has begun to explore the application of narrative practices in community circumstances (Collective, 1999;

Hancock, Chilcott, & Epston, 2007; Madsen, 2007c; White, 2003a). Recent literature on social work education recognizes narrative therapy as a values-based practice approach, and explores its applicability as a model of narrative-deconstructive practice to bridge the gap between clinical and social practice (Epston, Gavin, & Napan, 2004; Ungar, 2004; Vodde & Gallant, 2003). In this book, students explore possible applications for narrative practice that extend well beyond the realm of psychotherapy into using family-centered practices in a range of public sector work settings.

Narrative pedagogy is guided by a particular set of intentions, ethics, and aesthetics. Teachers informed by poststructuralist inquiry seek to develop intentional understandings of what is most precious to us in teaching and what we stand for in our beliefs, values, hopes, dreams, principles, commitments, and ethics. My teaching intention is to offer opportunities for reflective practitioners-in-training to step into the experiences of those they aspire to help, to listen attentively, and learn to hold themselves accountable to the seekers of their services. I want students to move beyond traditional power relations to better understand help-giving practices that contribute to more equitable relationships between human service providers and the people they aspire to help.

### *Narrative Principles in Action*

Narrative therapy course content brings together folk psychology traditions and formal academic training (White, 2004a). Personal accounts of experience are respected sources of knowledge. Within narrative interviewing practices, insider knowledges are privileged over expert vocabularies, and significant care is taken to ensure that language conveys people's actual experiences, rather than others' interpretations of these experiences. Teachers of narrative therapy face the challenge of deliberately accenting local knowledge and minimizing academic jargon, while learning concepts, values, and practices that fulfill standardized accreditation requirements.

Throughout the book, I illustrate ways in which the teacher's commitment to experience knowledge can inform learning experiences. Students read memoirs of pioneers in family therapy (Beels, 2001; Hoffman, 2002) and hear first-person accounts from people who describe their hard-earned preferences in therapy and other human services. Through exercises and assignments, students carry out and reflect upon the skills and knowledges they bring to their work as reflective practitioners (Sax, 2006).

In two-way accounts of therapy, the therapist takes responsibility to identify, acknowledge, and describe specific ways a therapeutic conversation contributes to his or her life (White, 1997c). This approach has emerged from a tradition of engagement that differs from traditional therapeutic practices in which the therapist examines his or her experiences of therapeutic conversations through the construct of counter-transference. I believe two-way and even multiple accounts of learning

are important aspects of a learning collaboratory, as well as to collaborative approaches to therapeutic conversations. Multiple accounts make it possible for people to learn some of the real effects of their stories on others – including people in elevated positions of power such as professional service providers and teachers.

Online communication offers multiple opportunities to structure courses to move beyond a one-way account of learning. Students benefit from knowing not only the influence of their stories on each other, but on my work as their teacher. In writing and in person, I strive to render visible the powerful ways in which students' work and thoughtful exchanges touch my life. I illustrate this book with many examples of the "two-way accounts" principle in action. With students' permission, I often share their work with others. Students are generally not only willing to have me share their on-line postings and writings, but highly appreciative of being able to contribute to others' learning. As Olivia emailed back to me **"**I feel like it wasn't an accident that my work traveled to other people. Every time I heard that my work was touching someone I also became touched powerfully. This is the beauty of narrative therapy isn't it? All parties end up being enriched by their work together."

The interactive website offers opportunities for a network of multiple accounts – for students to see themselves through many eyes within a web of connection. By reflecting online together about real effects on each other, the students gain experiential understanding that sticks with them well beyond their readings about two-way accounts. Again, this conversation does not revolve around me. I see my role here as a facilitator, to create and monitor forums for such lively exchanges to occur. I am often moved by the clear acknowledgements students give to each other especially since the teacher's evaluative role can add complexity to the teacher-student exchanges.

The course website offers online opportunities for ongoing inquiry with students about the effects of a particular classroom, reading, or online activity on their learning experience. While I offer the students certain knowledge and skills about teaching and therapeutic approach, I am always learning from their experiences. Each semester, I build on what I have learned from prior teaching while experimenting with new possibilities. Students express intrigue in hearing about what I learn from them. I have collected interesting responses to the following forum I began during the last week of class. I posted this forum after students learned about "two-way accounts" in their course readings and classroom discussion:

> *If you could experience yourselves through my eyes, what do you imagine you might see? Does it surprise you to hear that the ways you have engaged with the course materials has affected me and my sense of identity both as a teacher and as a life-long learner? In reflecting on this learning experience, what stands out to you? What have you learned from each other? What would you like to know from me about my experience(s) of this class?*

# PEDAGOGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

## Posting by Amy

> *For the longest time I viewed education from the dominant discourse of "filling a bucket" and writing down "facts" that I would later study and recite back on standardized exams. I learned how to work the system to meet the institution's expectations. Now, I have come to realize that education is so much more. It's lighting that spark of inquiry into alternative understandings that create space for multiple viewpoints with no ultimate "truth" or "fact."*

I have been heartened to discover a burgeoning literature that has grown out of the seminal work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire on popular and informal education (Freire, 1973, 1994, 1996) and the relevance for adult education (Apple, 2000, 2002, 2003; Vella, 1995a, 1995b). Freire questioned a "banking" concept of education where teachers deposit knowledge into the students' depositories. Banking education maintains a teacher-student dichotomy where those considered knowledgeable issue one-way communiqués and deposit their knowledge into those who know nothing. Freire lists ten attitudes and practices as also mirrored in oppressive cultural forces (Freire, 1973) p. 54:

*a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;*
*b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;*
*c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;*
*d) the teacher talks and the students listen meekly;*
*e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;*
*f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;*
*g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;*
*h) the teacher chooses the program content and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it;*
*i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;*
*j) the teacher is the subject of the learning process, which the pupils are mere objects.*

Freire proposed that education should instead seek to reconcile the student-teacher contradiction. I believe Freire's philosophy of education is highly relevant to adult education, including training practitioners in academic settings. His pedagogy highlights democracy, dialogue, and reciprocity as educational methods that situate education in the lived experience of all participants, including the teacher. As co-creators in "authentic thinking," the teacher partners with the student focusing on realities beyond ivory tower isolation. These educational principles orient everyone toward putting theoretical knowledge into practice or "praxis" – a synthesis of theory and practice in which each informs each other.

I too believe in working together with students to develop consciousness and committed action informed by and linked to values.

*Postmodern Pedagogy*

Postmodernism is a cultural phenomenon affecting philosophy, architecture, literature, music and other expressive arts. Jacques Derrida, Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty and other postmodern philosophers offer an outlook on education that challenges conventions, fosters innovation and change, encourages tolerance of ambiguity, emphasizes diversity, and accentuates the social construction of reality. Many narrative practitioners prefer the more specific term poststructuralism to describe an approach to inquiry that questions the concept of "self" as a singular and coherent entity, and is in contrast to structuralism's truth claims (Thomas, 2002; White, 1997b). I am not an expert on current debates about postmodernism and poststructuralism. However, I do believe my approach to teaching shares pedagogical challenges with others who embrace a collaborative outlook on education. I sometimes chose the umbrella terms "postmodern" or "collaborative" therapies as an effort to unify a diversity of approaches – not to obscure distinctions.

In 2002, I attended a workshop[5] that piqued my curiosity about the pedagogical challenges for teachers and trainers of postmodern therapies in academic settings. It spurred me to consider the parallels in power relations between the therapist/client and teacher/student relationships, and of the many institutionalized assumptions in academia that remain unexamined. How can teachers of postmodern therapies position themselves to teach and supervise in ways that are consistent with the values and guiding principles to which we aspire? Are there ways for teachers and students to respectfully discover and learn from two-way accounts of the learning experience?

As editors of a special issue of the Journal of Systemic Therapies on Teaching and Learning Postmodern Therapies, Paré and Tarragona contemplate pedagogical questions for teachers and trainers of postmodern therapies that "share a respectful, collaborative spirit that reflects a loosened grip on truth claims and purported expertise" (Paré & Tarragona, 2006, p. 2). They describe postmodern epistemologies as "reminding us that knowledge is not so much handed over as it is co-constructed through mutual talk." In this book, I respond to their question, "How might we teach conceptual frameworks and therapeutic interventions without simply duplicating modernist traditions that privilege instructors' knowledges"?

Lynn Hoffman drew from a specific exchange between students to reflect on her experience with the difference between "lions" and "lambs" in discussion groups. "Lions usually have their hands up and take strong stands, and they get called on and feel more and more intelligent. Lambs hold back, and don't often hold up their hands, and begin to feel more and more stupid. Gianfranco Cecchin called this result "systemic genius" and "systemic stupidity." In one group, a student objected that Lynn was against "open and honest discussion." When Lynn explained about

the lions and lambs, the student reflected, "Oh, I see, it's like affirmative action for shy people."

Since that time, Lynn has become increasingly interested in conversations that do not require consensus, and allow many voices to be heard. She captured my students' attention with her online description of Jean-Francois Lyotard.

**Posting by Lynn**

> *The man who defined postmodernism, Jean-Francois Lyotard, called this way of talking "paralogical." He meant that rather than following the logic of reason, which says there is a right and a wrong answer, you bypass logic and open the doors to many voices often in contradiction to one another.*

Interacting in the online conversation with students in my course reminded Lynn of poet John Keats' concept of "negative capability" – the ability to remain in the midst of doubts and uncertainties "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." For Lynn, the virtue of this online conversation was that it never descended into escalations and arguments about who and what is right. "Even when people did take stands one way or another, they never put each other in the wrong. So, Peggy, I think you successfully set the stage for what I think of as a 'postmodern' type of discourse."

*Ethical Considerations*

> *"Stick to the 'heart of what matters to you' so that you teach not as a measurable performance but rather because you believe what you have to say has to be said" (Epston, 2006).*

Ethics is an important content area in every course about therapeutic or counseling relationships. I have participated in many conversations with colleagues about creating space for discussing ethical considerations and dilemmas in our work as practitioners[6]. We note a common phenomenon – material about ethics usually focuses on professional codes regarding boundaries and confidentiality. Preventing breaches in confidentiality, exploitation, and dual relationships is indeed very important given the egregious violations that can occur and the very real litigious concerns for licensed professionals regulated by professional licensing boards.

In addition, teaching creates space for other ethical decisions that are often pushed to the margins. To whom are we accountable? What does it mean to be a professional and what does professional behavior look like? What about respectful greetings? What about services not available to people with low incomes or to the working poor? I illustrate this book with thoughtful and thought-provoking online exchanges between students, teacher, and outside visitors sparked by sharing favorite passages about the ethics of hospitality, accountability, collaboration, and professionalism (Bird, 2001; Buckley & Decter, 2006; Madsen, 2007a). Archived postings from the interactive websites from my classes afford the opportunity to often gather a vibrant glimpse into such dynamic conversation.

Ethical considerations in teaching collaborative therapies challenge us to:
- Teach in ways that are consistent with the philosophy and therapeutic stance to which we aspire;
- Offer our own knowledge and expertise without disqualifying students knowledges and skills;
- Be accountable to power relations between teacher-student; and
- Create contexts for collaborative learning.

The aesthetics of teaching postmodern therapies are based on personal style, preferences, and unique teaching abilities. We learn about our own special teaching skills when they are reflected back to us. Often this occurs through evaluation by supervisors, student feedback, and friendly critique from colleagues. In this book, I highlight learning about my own distinctive teaching abilities through exploration of special teaching moments. By sharing memorable experiences in the classroom and online, I strive to demonstrate how students actively guide my teaching preferences with a spirit of collaborative inquiry (Roth, 2007).

*Respect for School Culture*

**Posting by Nan**

> *I am both in line with others' affirmations of collaborative approaches to psychotherapy and, at the same time, questioning of these very same views of this newer form of therapy as being the one, right way of approaching the challenging task of helping people. Perhaps my unique respect for and skepticism of narrative therapy is rooted in my education in the area of psychology. Until now, I had yet to be exposed to this emerging field of thought, having instead been trained in the more traditional, individual psychology perspective. This unique experience of mine has shaped my accolades and criticisms alike of narrative therapy, and it is from this stance that I share my thoughts on the subject.*

Students study narrative therapy within undergraduate and graduate programs with particular philosophical traditions. Teaching collaborative therapies in different academic settings – some with vastly different traditions and values – highlights the importance of respect for school culture. I have learned the hard way how my biases inform my teaching. I strive to learn directly from students' understandings about their particular school culture and what they most deeply value from their studies. In constructing course requirements, I vary my expectations according to different school cultures[7].

Students often share their dilemmas as they imagine putting narrative therapy into practice alongside other therapeutic approaches. For example, students learning transference-based therapies are particularly perplexed as they seek an eclectic approach that might encompass psychodynamic in addition to solution focused, cognitive-behavioral and narrative therapies. Social work students revisit their understanding of "the strengths perspective." Psychology students often

struggle to understand the implications of post-structuralist notions of identity and development. In each of these situations, the online forum provides a safe haven for provocative conversation.

Not everyone is enamored with narrative therapy. I often feel a creative tension between making space for different voices and my responsibility to teach narrative therapy. How much room is there for complexity when questions come from contradictory points of view? How can I avoid the dangers of "group think" so students can speak candidly about their skeptical thoughts and feelings? Over the years, I have discovered some personal edges of learning as I strive to listen respectfully to others drawn to different therapeutic traditions. At the same time, I believe it does not work for students to continually attempt to interpret narrative practice through the language of a different approach. To the extent possible, I encourage students to temporarily check their competing beliefs at the door, so they can attend to learning this particular approach. For example, I was heartened when by the end of a semester a student from a Freudian psychoanalytic tradition told me that he had come to understand my encouragement to listen and experience narrative therapy without trying to see everything according to the id, ego, and superego.

**Posting by Jordana**

> *Engaging with this narrative material has been rather humorous for me because I have realized, to my surprise, how influenced by traditional psychology I am. Long-held assumptions that I took for granted regarding what is helpful to a client have been challenged. I am grateful to this class for having opened me up to ideas requiring a real shift in my thinking as to what is healing for people and communities. It is not that I should sit with my clients and "process" their emotions in a "narrative way" as I originally presumed. Rather, what is healing is the new story and its plot and the new way of being in the world that it allows.*

Teaching narrative practice within a psychodynamic program poses particular challenges as students seek to integrate their psychodynamic studies with narrative practice. Narrative therapy introduces a paradigm shift in relation to the meaning and practice of therapy from intra-psychic, transference-based psychotherapies to a focus on historical and cultural context (McLeod, 1997, 2001). In this book, I include questions from students who are studying narrative therapy while also learning psychodynamic traditions. I believe there is much to learn from their thoughtful examination of theory and practice. Many of their questions remain unanswered and their confusion lingers throughout the course. I tell them that this "not-knowing" tension is something I greatly value. To add to the confusion, I introduce the concepts of "ethics with ambiguity" and "ethics without virtue." (Welch, 1999), encouraging students to develop skills to hold moral and political complexities without resorting to "Us against Them" thinking.

Teaching narrative practice in a postmodern social work program is a very different experience. By the time I meet these students, many have developed

sophisticated knowledge of social constructionism, the strengths perspective, social justice, and human rights. Prior teachers introduced them to narrative therapy and now they are eager to learn all they can. In many ways, I feel with such students as though I have arrived in "teaching heaven." In this book, I describe my discovery of another set of challenges as students learn to put ideas into practice. I include reflections and questions by students steeped in the strengths perspective to convey how they work together to disengage from well-meaning practices of applause, to move beyond pointing out positives to "asking not telling" people their stories.

Throughout this book, I try to be transparent in describing my approach to the challenge as teacher of narrative therapy to convey respect and curiosity while not encouraging a forced marriage between narrative and psychodynamic practice. Many students of psychodynamic therapy have already committed to following another course of study and/or they hesitate before delving into learning an approach that is so different from their other courses. When students cannot immerse themselves in the course material, I strive to kindle a fire for pursuing the study of narrative practice in the coming years. Often students of psychodynamic therapy are taught a simplistic view of narrative therapy in comparison to the highly nuanced traditions of transference-based psychotherapy. In my teaching, I aim to demonstrate the depth and complexity of narrative therapy practice.

I invite you, the reader, to enjoy the exploration.

CHAPTER 2

# OPENING THE ONLINE LENS[8]

**Posting from Christie**

> *As many of you know from previous classes, I tend to be pretty quiet in class discussions. I think that I just need some time to sit back and chew on the material for awhile before I can offer my thoughts in any organized, intelligent way. This setting, while admittedly a bit unnerving at first, has become rather liberating. Besides, how else could I have gained such tremendous insight from all of your stories, opinions, and general brilliance?*

Teaching practitioners-in-training effectively with technology requires significant course preparation, including an electronic syllabus, course site design, online forums for reflection and letter-writing, and course assignments. My experience using an interactive website to augment face-to-face classes powerfully demonstrates a collaborative learning community facilitated but not dominated by the teacher. Through a course website, students perform, witness, and reflect upon each other's course assignments. In this chapter, I share illustrations to demonstrate how I use online pedagogy conducive to the ethic of collaboration and innovative circulation practices that are cornerstones of narrative therapy (Sax, 2003, 2006, 2007a).

I am not someone for whom mechanical knowledge comes easily. Each step along the way has taken a lot of trial and error work with more moments of exasperation than I like to admit. Through practice, I eventually found a computer comfort zone, and the self-confidence that makes it possible for me to venture into new territory. Fortunately, I have been given invaluable technical assistance along the way[9].

Not every teacher finds moving into online teaching a natural or comfortable step. Colleagues have reminded me that there is no magic in online learning, any more than there is magic in conversation[10]. Good ideas, expressed initially in embryonic form, require others to express curiosity and inquiry. Rather than occurring by chance, good classroom conversations are facilitated by an instructor who structures the conversation to ensure that it goes somewhere and that participants do not get lost. This is equally true for online discussions.

Often when I share with other teachers my enthusiasm for using an interactive website to enhance classroom teaching, they respond with skepticism and concern about increasing their workload. Teachers inundated with daily email need a good reason to add even more technology to their lives.

Teaching online means major changes in teachers' distribution of labor. I put significant preparation time into launching an interactive website. Even when I am

out of town, I stay engaged in the online discussion. But in my experience, using a website to complement classroom teaching has been well worth the time and effort it requires. Students' weekly postings keep them engaged with course materials throughout the course. For some classes, I have done away with assigning a final paper in favor of students' continuing online engagement through the numerous opportunities I provide on the course website. I no longer dread grading the pile-up of papers at the end of a course.

## ONLINE PEDAGOGY

The online medium is redefining community, the networks of people with whom one forges connections, and ways of linking lives with each other. Email, instant messaging, live journals, blogs and wiki are transforming the landscape of connection and consciousness for people in the 21st century. Much has already been written about the use of online communication tools in higher education and applying design principles to course design. (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996; Funaro & Montell, 1999; Ritchie & Hoffman, 1996; Salter, 2001; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2006; Tinker, 1997). With the rapid advances in technology, online possibilities seem limitless: as a storehouse for information, avenues for research, and interactive communication. However, "…as with other new educational technologies, it is not so much the tool that improves teaching and learning but how the instructor integrates the tool into the curriculum and into the educational setting" (Ragan, 1999). The key is to plan ahead how online communication will be used to meet course objectives and to choose judiciously among the many options.

In my review of literature on pedagogical roles for online discussion, I was excited to discover an enthusiasm for designing learning environments that are "…more authentic, situated, interactive, project-oriented, interdisciplinary, learner-centered, and which take into account the varieties of students' learning styles" (Berge, 1997)[11]. Communication and information technologies are viewed as tools for adopting principles of good practice for teaching and learning in higher education (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996; Funaro & Montell, 1999; Harasim et al., 1997). These include active learning techniques conducive to reflective thinking and creative problem-solving, and isomorphic to the guiding principles of narrative therapy. Chichering and Ehrmann (1996) list seven principles: 1) Encourage contact between students and faculty, 2) Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students, 3) Use active learning techniques, 4) Give prompt feedback, 5) Emphasize time on task, 6) Communicate high expectations, and 7) Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

## COURSE PREPARATION

When I was first hired to teach a course using online technology to supplement classroom sessions, I was paid to take a training course titled, Teaching Effectively Online.[12] The course provided a conceptual framework and technical skills for

teaching online, including readings, web resources, and peer discussion. It opened me to the potential for using online communication tools in higher education and helped me to apply design principles in planning my own course (Ritchie & Hoffman, 1996; Salter, 2001; Tinker, 1997).

In designing a course on narrative approaches to social work, I was guided by the following provocative questions:

– What tools of inquiry are available to make meaning out of cultural and professional assumptions about therapy, the role of the therapist and client, and the therapeutic relationship?
– What is important for social work graduate students to understand about the cultural history of psychotherapy, and in particular, developments in the field of family therapy toward collaborative approaches within the last quarter century?
– How might I foster students' curiosity about collaborative approaches to therapy, otherwise known as postmodern, social constructionist, discursive therapies, which have emerged as alternatives to psychoanalytic, psychodynamic therapies?
– Within an intensive course, how could graduate students develop understandings of the ideas and ways of working of "narrative therapy"?
– In the face of discouraging trends for therapists and other human service providers toward overworked, overstressed and underpaid "burn-out," how might I convey some of the possibilities for invigoration and creativity that these developments offer?

As I prepared my initial course, I thought about how online communication might augment classroom contact to accomplish course objectives. I sought to facilitate a collaborative learning community in which students would 1) be comfortable sharing curiosities and reflections, while minimizing the effects of what Michael White (1997) borrowing Foucault's expression, calls, "the evaluative gaze" (Foucault, 1973); and 2) practice their newly acquired narrative therapy skills, specifically reflection, outsider witness practices and letter-writing.

About a month before the course begins, I send a welcoming email to enrolled students with instructions on accessing the course website. I encourage students to explore the website as if on a treasure hunt, following the electronic links to the syllabus, content areas, assignments, reading materials, resources, and discussion board. This first email is intentionally written to arouse a sense of intrigue and discovery in students from the very beginning, to help set the stage for the active approach I hope will characterize their participation:

> *I am pleased to welcome you into "Collaborative Approaches to Therapeutic Conversations." The course is structured around this website. Please familiarize yourself with each section of the course site so you can readily follow the course design and get a feel for the spirit of it. I've had a lot of fun designing this course site, which hopefully sets the stage for a lively, interactive, intensive learning experience. In some ways, I envy you since you have such a wondrous world of exploration ahead. However, proceed with caution, as these materials pose provocative questions that can change the way you think about many things. Enjoy!*

*Electronic Syllabus*

In preparing an interactive website to enhance classroom teaching, I closely reviewed my collection of narrative therapy materials, explored the Web for online resources, and then linked the two to design an electronic course syllabus. My first course, "Narrative Approaches to Social Work" was five weeks long, with five content units: 1) discovering our intellectual ancestors; 2) the guiding principles in narrative therapy; 3) narrative interviewing practices; 4) thickening the alternative story; 5) the ethics of collaboration; and 6) applications to practice. Over the years, I continue to tweak the syllabus, including adding further links to online resources as they have become available.

*Course Design*

The online component is organized around the course website. While nothing quite takes the place of coffee after class or meeting in the corridor, the interactive website provides a forum to keep conversation active between classroom meetings. I structure forums for students to reflect on assigned readings, classroom activities, and assignments. Initially, I pose questions to get the conversation started; soon, the website comes alive as students address these questions as well as start their own threads of inquiry. I select thought-provoking reading materials to stimulate reflection and conversation. From prior experience (both as teacher and student), I have learned to structure activities that foster ongoing discussion of assigned readings. I let students know that we will be discussing readings in class and online.

## FOSTERING A LEARNING COLLABORATORY

### Posting from Margot

> *The richest learning environments I have been in are those where we have created a safe space to learn, make mistakes, take risks, feel uncomfortable – knowing that those around me are doing the same thing and are respecting my bumbling humanness. Activities like role plays, fishbowl conversations and small group or one-on-one conversations around a specific, probing question seem to work best. I haven't had an online class before and I'm finding it hard to imagine this kind of learning can occur while looking into a screen rather than a human face, although I can see the value of reading and writing responses with time to think and process first.*

As teacher, I strive to create a hospitable atmosphere in which no one is the expert and we are all learning together. Often, this means getting out of the way so students can talk amongst themselves. As Danielle, an MSW student, reflected, "The use of the website really did deepen and move the relationship among our class along more quickly...The conversation was able to continue with such an unabashed depth beyond the classroom between class times, thus maintaining our connection with one another and shared thinking."

*Preferred Ways of Learning*

> "Collaboration doesn't mean doing whatever the client or supervisee wants; it is a process negotiated among people where all the knowledges available are valued and considered." (Behan, 2003)

I create space for students to actively participate in steering a course oriented to their preferred ways of learning, with activities structured to enhance their learning and build community. By not being in the center of these interactions, I can sit back to keep my eye on many different aspects of learning and interaction, steering the course accordingly. In particular, I try to stay cognizant of the effects of unspoken power relations, and to seize opportunities to explore the influence of culture and context on our experiences with each other, and to share applications for these deconstructive listening skills in our unique work settings.

An interactive website makes it possible for students to participate more actively in decision-making that shapes learning activities. I do my best to build on their preferences – while at the same time, staying grounded in the planning that went into constructing the course syllabus. When students first join the online discussion board, they find several questions from me:

> *Have you experienced teaching environments where you have felt fully engaged in collaborative learning? What about any classes that have effectively used the online medium? How about any ideas that come from "learning the hard way" about what doesn't work? Sharing these "hands on" educational lessons will help us shape a collaborative learning community conducive to our most stimulating and satisfying learning experiences.*

In reflecting on their preferred ways of learning from prior experience, students begin to share stories with each other. Often they speak about their desire for a teaching milieu in which atmosphere and relationships are conducive to taking risks and learning from mistakes.

**Posting by Tawanna**

> *I think it is possible to have a relationship that is mutually explorative. The times that I have felt fully engaged and challenged are during class discussions where people are willing to take risks by sharing their ideas and what drives or motivates them. I learn best in a collaborative setting, whether it be small group/class discussions or on an on-line forum. I expect that the course material along with the guest speakers will provide a supportive platform for all of us to learn and share ideas with one another.*

I listen to the preferences that students bring to the course. Sometimes I join in by asking more questions. Similar to narrative interviewing, and letter-writing practices, I directly quote students' reflections rather than attempting to interpret their statements. Often, I compile the online suggestions as a way to acknowledge the particular meanings and life experiences valued by classmates; I then invite the

students to join me in shaping the course, according to their preferences. I compiled the following list from what students have taught me to share with other instructors:

### TEN TIPS FOR CREATING A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY

- Offer multiple opportunities for students to shape the learning environment based on their own preferences.
- Assume students are knowledgeable and skillful – continually ask them to reflect on learnings from their own life experiences and how we might incorporate their learnings into the class.
- Get students personally involved in what they are learning. Structure exercises and assignments that invite students to apply practices to their own lives.
- Avoid the passive dry lecture format in favor of more active learning with-in-class exercises, letter writing, role-playing, interviews. Experiment with creative options.
- Provide opportunities to "decenter" the teacher's voice and encourage students to share their ideas and work with each other.
- Encourage reflection on readings, in-class experiences, etc. including implications, applications, ripple effects, inspiration and provocations.
- Give two-way accounts of learning: Let students know specific ways this learning experience is affecting you – how what they say and do impacts on your own thoughts, teaching, etc. Avoid the culture of applause. Use yourself as an example when you make mistakes – show how you reflect, acknowledge. and rise to the occasion.
- In academic settings, make the evaluative gaze transparent from the start. Share your dilemmas, intentions, and a behind-the-scenes view of choices you have made.
- Invite conversation with outside voices – guest speakers, virtual visitors, authors, etc. Include people who can speak with insider knowledge.
- Provide continual opportunities over the duration of the course for students to reflect on how the course is going and suggest how to make it better. Strive to make it as comfortable as possible for students to give constructive input and reflect on positive and negative ripple effects of provocative materials on various domains of their lives.

### ONLINE CONVERSATION

Using an interactive website has exposed me to a variety of course management tools, all of which feature possibilities for interaction through a discussion board[13]. Online conversation revolves around specific forums that invite participants into dialogue. When students enter the course website, I give a description of the online forum and do my best to familiarize them with the course culture and expectations, as conveyed in the following instructions:

> *From time to time, I will join the online conversation. I look forward to reading your comments, and to adding my own. As well, please feel free to ask me any specific questions. However, the discussion should not focus on me and my thoughts. This is an opportunity for you to explore and express some of your own ideas based on your own studies and hard-earned knowledge about living and learning. My hope is that we can create a safe context in which we can explore ideas together. We will all be learning from each other, and co-constructing something unique.*
>
> *Some of you may have had experience with classes that use online discussion as a teaching tool. I welcome any suggestions from your experiences that can make this work as well as possible. Feel free to try out this "discussion tool" by pressing the "discussion" link, and adding your comments here.*

Similar to the role of the collaborative therapist, the teacher creates a context for conversation and extending invitations for meaningful engagement while giving space for individual exploration. As course developer, I provide the basic website structure and design. I construct the questions to introduce students both to the philosophical underpinnings of narrative therapy and to explore specific narrative practices. Each week I post several questions based on the in-class experiences, assigned readings, and course curriculum. I invite students to respond to any of these questions – or to start their own thread of inquiry. When I join the online conversation, I take care to keep the students' reflections at the center, to foster a collaborative learning environment in which we are all learning from each other and co-constructing a unique experience.

Students use the discussion forum to post and share reflections and questions about topics as they emerge. They begin engaging in the generous sharing, intimacy, and connectedness that becomes the bedrock of our online learning community. In response to questions, students become "co-researchers," (Epston, 1999) as they apply the ideas and practices to their own lives and work settings. Everyone is expected to participate in the online discussion with at least three postings each week that are based on course content and demonstrate familiarity with the readings. I welcome students to write more, "so long as we make room for everyone's voices to be heard."

*Guidelines for Reflections:* In addition to the introductory instructions, I post the following guidelines for online reflections:

> *I will open the discussion with a question. Someone will need to begin the online conversation with a response. The next person's comment should not just refer back to my original question, but rather reflect upon the preceding reflection(s). In other words, please do not put me at the center of your discussion. I want you to listen to each other, and engage in real conversation, which is different from simply waiting for space to say what you want to say. As well, I want to do what we can to minimize the power relations of the "teacher as authority" and learners as "empty vessels" – otherwise known as the "sucking up to the teacher" tradition.*

*At the same time, every posting need not link with the preceding post. There will be a lot to say, and before long we will have multiple threads going at once. Feel free to ask your own questions, and spontaneously respond to others. If you start a new thread, just give it a new heading, so we will be able to keep track.*

*After the first week, we will review how this is going, and re-evaluate accordingly. As the course progresses, we will be using the online discussion format to experiment with the guidelines for "reflecting teamwork" and "outsider witness practices." During the second half of the course, you will have the opportunity to share online one of your course assignments, and then to reflect upon each other's work. Instructions for this assignment will be thoroughly described in class. But for the first week, my main goal is to create a secure comfortable conversational context, to get the conversation going and for students to begin to engage with the materials.*

*Along the way, please feel free to add here any reflections and suggestions that draw from your experiences in using this online forum.*

*Topics for Online Reflection*

**Posting by Suzanne**

*For the first time, I feel like I have the time to really ponder the readings and to be involved in hearing other people's ideas about them so that I can truly immerse myself in the subject matter. I would much rather spend the outside of class time on this than on a research paper.*

The questions I post serve as guideposts for the online discussion that is further explored throughout this book. The discussion board is used both for postings that are shared with the entire class, and for the small group work conversations that are later described. Figure 1 illustrates what one discussion board looked like by the end of a course with 20 students lasting five weeks.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

After the first class, I post questions online to invite students to share their initial thoughts and questions with each other. I do my best to set a welcoming and nonjudgmental tone. I open forums for students to explore together provocative and potentially difficult issues that touch on their own lives and experiences. Here is an introductory question I pose under the forum "Questions and Ponderings:"

*This is your chance to try out the discussion board. What are some of your initial thoughts as you begin this course? As you read the course materials, what stands out? What surprises you? What lingers with you from our class meetings? Do you have further reflections on any of the questions posed in class? What do you think about the idea of viewing theories like metaphors*

*situated within a particular historic/cultural context? Which metaphors have you found to be most helpful in your work? What's it like to be asked to deconstruct what you might have otherwise experienced as sacred in your studies so far? Is the world ready for this way of thinking and working? What are your initial thoughts about what it might be like to explore this approach within your existing world? What in particular strikes you about the collaborative nature of this way of working? Do you see application in your work with children and families, and if so, how? Is there a different question that you wished I'd asked and if so, what is it?*

*Table 2-1. Discussions*

| Topic | Total |
|---|---|
| Description of online forum | 12 |
| Creating a collaborative learning community | 16 |
| Questions and ponderings | 46 |
| Identity | 26 |
| Narrative as living practice | 36 |
| Applications | 43 |
| Ethics and accountability | 19 |
| Practice | 90 |
| Video reflections | 22 |
| Preferred identity assignment | 33 |
| Tellings and retellings | 11 |
| Small group #1: Sarah, Ellen & Jill | 17 |
| Small group #2: Kevin, Brenda, Danielle & Julia | 38 |
| Small group #3: Amy, Lynn & Cally | 23 |
| Small group #4: Kayla T, Karen & Amy R | 28 |
| Small group #5: Stacey, Rachel & Danielle | 21 |
| Small group #6: Bobbi, Michelle, Carol & Sherry | 31 |
| Inspiration and provocation | 19 |
| How is this course going? | 11 |
| Ripple effects | 37 |
| Leftovers | 9 |
| Notes | 0 |
| Main | 1 |
| All | 589 |

From the start, I invite students to grapple in community online with the edges of their learning experiences. I strive to create a space in which people do not need to show off what they know in a cut and dried manner, but rather allow for expressions of confusion, skepticism, and pondering. As students begin to study the specific practices of narrative therapy, I ask the following:

> *As you learn about narrative practice, what do you find yourself most intrigued and/or puzzled by? What stands out to you as you learn narrative concepts and practices such as externalizing conversations, unique outcomes, decentering practices, remembering practices, and reauthoring conversations? What questions and/or areas of confusion do you find yourself puzzling over? If you could be in conversation with Michael White or David Epston, what would you want to say and/or ask them?*

### *Deconstructive Listening*

Narrative therapy teaches us to think about situations in their cultural and historic contexts, and to inquire into specific discourses such as class, race, gender, and sexuality (Freedman & Combs, 1996b; White, 1991). Students learn to question taken-for-granted beliefs, truths, knowledge, and power. A process of deconstruction is applied to the ideas and experiences that shape service providers' practices and the people who consult them and to their interactions. Professional ideas and practices can be "unpacked" as professional discourses within the cultural history of psychotherapy (Cushman, 1995) including "truth claims" underlying such assumed knowledges as identity, psychopathology, problem formation, and resolution (White, 1997c).

An online forum provides an opportunity for students to experience "deconstructive listening" with each other. They share stories, dilemmas, curiosities, and questions about applications both in personal lives and work contexts. I often begin a discussion topic that invites students to take a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge about psychotherapy. Concurrently, I assign course readings that focus on the meaning of a discourse in social construction (Burr, 1995), the cultural history of psychotherapy (Cushman, 1995) and deconstructing conversations (White, 1991). Time permitting, I show video clips in class from a range of movies and television shows to provoke inquiry into cultural and historic discourses about psychotherapy depicted in popular media. The following online topic and accompanying questions I post have generated very lively discussion:

### *Cultural and Professional Discourses about Psychotherapy*

- How can we take a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge about psychotherapy?
- What part does psychotherapy play in the complicated cultural landscape of early 21st Century America?
- How can a critical inquiry of the helping disciplines influence the ways we think about psychotherapy?

– What are some of the cultural and professional discourses in the United States about mental health and mental illness, therapy, the designated role of the psychotherapist and client and the therapeutic relationship?
– What are some of the "absent but implicit" assumptions about power, gender and culture as depicted in portrayals of therapy in movies and television?
– What are the dominant discourses that circulate in the therapy room? How do these discourses influence the ways we construct meaning about people who consult us, their relationships and our approach to therapy?
– What does all of this have to do with Family Therapy?

I encourage students to step back and identify some of the social influences on their perceived understandings of psychotherapy. Sometimes I join in, sharing with students some of my own thinking and questions. At other times, I listen, reserving my questions for a later time. I share how I too have experienced shock waves in discovering that I could not simply rely on what I had been taught as truth claims — even when I wholeheartedly embraced the logic, wisdom, usefulness of a given concept or categorization. I recount my personal experience of paradoxically feeling discouraged and enlivened by "enlightening disorientation." In Chapter Five, "When Nice is Not Enough," I share student responses to the following questions posted on an online forum entitled "Is nothing sacred?"

> *If I cannot trust what I have been taught by people I respect, what can I trust? If all knowledge is subjective, does this mean I need to discount psychology's rich history and knowledge base? Will this pursuit isolate me and make me depressed and lonely? Will I alienate myself from respected teachers and colleagues when I apply the tools of critical inquiry to explore their ideas as well? Where is the ground to stand on? Is nothing Sacred?*

*Ethics and Accountability*

Every course on collaborative therapy exposes students to a range of ethical considerations that supplement the practitioner's professional code of ethics. In particular, I design course materials for students to become accountable to their professional privilege as they explore the ethics of collaboration and the inevitable ethical dilemmas that arise in their work as human service practitioners. Throughout the course website, I provide opportunities for students to ponder their personal and professional ethics, as exemplified in my posting below. These key narrative therapy ideas and students' responses to them form a central theme in this book:

> *In this course, there is frequent reference to ethics and accountability. What are your thoughts about what guides the ethics of practice? To whom is a service provider accountable, and how is this put into practice? What are you noticing about yourself as you think about what informs your own ethical stance? What specific dilemmas come to mind, as you grapple with your concomitant commitments to professional, relational and personal ethics?*

When given the opportunity, students have a lot to say about ethics and accountability. Committed to learning their professional code of ethics, they embrace the additional

opportunity to talk openly about ethical complexities and consequent dilemmas. They often remark on the contrast with more traditional training in ethics for mental health practitioners, as expressed by Bobbi. “My earlier training was all about boundaries and not in any way revealing anything from my personal life.” Online course forums provide opportunities for students’ to share their own sophisticated commentaries on ethics.

**Posting by Andrew**

> *Ethics are often thrown out there like hard and fast rules, so that we often think of ethics and laws as one and the same. But they are not. I feel that if this is becoming more confusing to you, then you must be headed in the right place. To use the post-modern/social construction/narrative lens on this, why did we become so wrapped up in ethics? Is it to protect the disempowered clients from empowered social workers? Is it because of lots of previous litigation, in which professional organizations like the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) say, “We really need to crank up the ethics training?” Is it to protect our own vulnerabilities? Is it malpractice insurance companies determining what is ethical behavior? How do “template” ethics allow for individual cases where it’s up to the person to determine what is/is not ethical? Is it the social work profession trying desperately to legitimize itself through language, professional literature, schools, and ethics? All rhetorical questions of course.*

*Philosophical Foundations*

Classroom experiences, readings, and online discussion give students multiple opportunities to further their understanding of the philosophical foundations of narrative therapy. This book includes many student reflections and questions as they ponder the following questions:

> ***The Narrative Metaphor:*** *What is meant by the narrative metaphor and how does this impact the way you think about your work? What are the implications for theory and clinical practice? What are your thoughts about the shift in metaphor from individual to systems to stories? What are some of your lingering thoughts after hearing the stories shared in class?*
>
> ***Therapy as Social Construction:*** *Given all that you are reading, what are your thoughts about collaborative approaches to therapy and therapy as social construction? What are some of the implications and applications, particularly in your own work settings? What questions does this raise?*
>
> ***Identity:*** *What are some of your thoughts about different approaches to identity – structuralist/internal state identity and non-structuralist/intentional understandings of identity? How might this impact on the ways you think about psychotherapy? What relevance might this have for your own life and your identity as a practitioner in training?*

*Narrative as Living Practice*

Teaching narrative therapy affects people's lives in ways that extend beyond usual academic studies:

**Posting by Becca**

> *Often course constructs remain in my mind just long enough for me to regurgitate them for the final exam, but soon after, they are quickly pushed aside to make room for new teachings. This time, this will not be the case. In encountering an entirely new way to approach the world through the lens of narrative therapy and its poststructuralist roots, my worldview (and more specifically my perspective on empirical psychology) has been eternally altered. The change in my thought processes that has driven me to question all discourses is in fact so fundamental that I don't believe I could do away with it even if I tried. I find myself continually attempting to share with my fellow psychology majors as well as my other friends the new ideas to which I have been exposed, and I would like to think that if every small event makes an impact on our society, by perpetuating the flow of knowledge, I am helping others to see a new manner of approaching our world from a critical, questioning, and analytical standpoint. Furthermore, I frequently spend time after class relating the stories of guest speakers to my friends and bragging about the fact that we are able to personally interact with the authors of the texts we study. Throughout my college career, I have never witnessed this type of direct involvement in the course material, and it has certainly had a lasting effect on me. If memories are ripples in the fabric of life, my experience this J-term is a tidal wave.*

Through reading assignments, classroom experiences and online forums, I constantly strive to render visible narrative as living practice. After assigning the article "To Do No Harm" (Bird, 2001), I start an online conversation:

> *Johnella Bird describes her way of working as "a living practice." In class, we spoke about holding ourselves accountable to the ideas and practices we embrace. What are some of your thoughts and questions as you reflect on power, language, meaning-making, transparency and the ethic of collaboration? As we begin this course of study together, what are you noticing about how this approach makes sense or does not make sense to you? What role would you like self-reflection to play in your work? What living practices would you like to further develop – and how might you distinguish this commitment from practices of self-surveillance? What else occurs to you as you ponder narrative as living practice?*

I demonstrate how teaching informs my work as a therapist and vice versa. As a practitioner-teacher, I share stories from my work as a therapist that breathe life into philosophical ideas. I then invite students to write letters and share online reflections with the people whose stories they hear. Michael White's attention to

what we hold most precious to us guides our study of poststructuralist inquiry and intentional understandings of identity (Thomas, 2002). Class exercises and course assignments give students opportunities to "try out" narrative practices, applying them to their own lives and relationships. Students often share online their various challenges as they attempt to apply narrative practices to their particular work contexts.

## PEOPLING THE EXCHANGE

With students' permission, I offer a "guest pass" to select authors, guest speakers and narrative therapy enthusiasts. Many students find this to be an invigorating, expanding approach that greatly contributes to their learning. I further explain and illustrate this teaching practice in Chapter Six, "Peopling the Course." Sometimes virtual visitors ask questions that otherwise might go unnoticed. For example, in the following exchange, Jo Viljoen, an online guest from South Africa, inquires into students' learning experiences:

> *Hi everyone, I would like to consult with you as students, if I may. I am teaching a short course in narrative therapy over here in South Africa and I would love to hear from you what it was that sparked your interest in the course. I would like to know this for my own preparation for my own students. What should a teacher of narrative do and not do for her students? How did Peggy manage to get you all so actively involved? What does it mean to you to be able to make such detailed contributions to the course through your papers and reflections? I would really appreciate some ideas from your side of the world. Thanks in advance.*

**Posting by Becca**

> *Hi Jo, There are a number of things that Peggy has done that have proved successful in sparking our interest in the material. For me, the most beneficial has been her intent on getting us personally involved with what we are learning. Be it in class discussion, Internet posts or paper assignments that relate the ideas to our own lives and studies, this approach allows students to get away from the passive, dry lecture format and into the realm of more active learning.*
>
> *The Internet reflections have been one of my favorite parts of this course. Through the posting process, we are given more time to prepare our thoughts. Secondly, posting not only provides us with the opportunity to continue discussions after class is over, but also allows for input from authors, guest speakers, and therapists or other knowledgeable individuals. In addition, posting gives the more reserved students an opportunity to express their ideas in absence of the pressure and trepidation of addressing a large group of people. Finally, posting allows us to make detailed contributions to the course, which has given me a great deal of confidence in*

*my ability to share my own thoughts within a discussion setting. It is quite rewarding to see not only that others may have been thinking along the same lines, but also that classmates are able to expand the possibilities and bring to light new or different perspectives.*

Sometimes, I am able to arrange for students to engage in conversation with authors of their assigned readings. At other times, I ask students to post the questions they might like to ask the authors. When guest speakers come to class, I start an online forum in which students can share further questions, reflections and acknowledgments. Often, the guest speakers will continue to engage with students by joining them on the online forum; alternatively, I serve as an online conduit, by emailing postings to them.

## PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

A course website gives ample opportunities for students to reflect on shared exercises. Often, students start their own threads, posting reflections and asking each other questions. As students learn to distinguish the conceptual framework and guiding principles of narrative practice from other therapeutic approaches, they become familiar with specific narrative interviewing practices (Morgan, 2000b; Russell & Carey, 2004; White, 2007c). Throughout the course, I give students multiple opportunities to experience narrative practice "from the inside out." Students read about a specific narrative interviewing practice, try it out in class, and then after class share online the effects of these experiences. Following are examples of how I prompt the online discussion:

***Statement of position map:*** *Today we talked further about the "statement of position" map and externalizing conversations. From various perspectives, you had the opportunity to experience externalizing conversations within the in-class interviewing exercise. What are some of your lingering thoughts and questions? How do these reflections link to what you have been reading? What are you left wondering? What kind of practice would you like to experience more in order to feel confident with asking questions oriented by the statement of position map?*

***Reauthoring conversations:*** *You have now been introduced to Michael White's "reauthoring conversations" map. What comes to mind as you begin to study this map and apply it to yourself? Does it seem relevant to your interviewing in specific work situation and if so, how? What seems confusing, unsettling and/or enticing about possible uses of this map in your work?*

***Outsider witness practices****: Through your reading and in class, you have been learning about incorporating outsider witness practices and the four categories of response into narrative practice. What are some outsider witness skills that you would like to further develop? Can you envision creative ways to link people's lives with shared themes within your own work*

*setting? What possibilities are you thinking about? Are there areas of excitement for you? Are there also dilemmas on your mind, and if so, how do you envision addressing them?*

***Interviewing practices:*** *Today in class we experienced a four-part narrative interview. Thank you, Sarah for volunteering and sharing some of your inner life with us. This forum is for any lingering thoughts about the interview. Sarah, you are welcome (but not in any way required) to share any reflections on the experience. For the rest of us, this is an opportunity to continue the fourth part of the interview – do you have any "debriefing" questions, thoughts, ponderings?....What was it like to participate in this interview? What was it like to be an outsider witness (in either the first or the second "tier")? What do you find yourself still thinking about? If you had it to do over again, is there anything you would change? What have I forgotten to ask that you would like to say about this interview experience?*

I then offer additional invitations for students to reflect online on their in-class experiences:

*Today (in a very hot, humid room) you watched David Epston's interview with Sebastian[14]. You were also given a session transcript, with the instruction to take note of whenever in the interview you felt a glimmer of hope or solidarity, from the perspective of either Sebastian's mother or stepfather. What did you discover when you traced these moments of hope and/or solidarity to specific questions? What did you notice about this interview and David's practices of inquiry that really captured your attention? What do you think about his notion that "open ended questions invite dullness," and of David's proposal that the more specific you wish an inquiry to be the more specific the questions should be? What would you like to learn about David's approach to narrative inquiry and what questions does this raise for you? What have I forgotten to ask (blame it on the humidity) that you would like to address either online or in a subsequent class?*

*Letter-Writing*

After experiencing a narrative interview in class – either live or on video – we often practice letter-writing. I then create an online topic to practice letter-writing skills, and as an opportunity to conflate training, supervision, and practice:

*Narrative therapy offers boundless opportunities for letter-writing and other therapeutic documents. What kind of letter-writing skills would you like to further develop? What are your current thoughts about the potential for various kinds of therapeutic documents in your own workplace? What are you reading about and/or hearing in class that you find yourself pondering? Can you think of a particular story to tell that would illustrate how these practices have or might "thicken" the alternative story?*

I invite students to bring their reflections and questions online:

> *What are you thinking about since watching the DVD of the interview with Meghan and me? What was it like to write the letters to Meghan? Do you notice any new developments in your reflections on boundaries and ethics? What if anything do you find yourself pondering about endings and new beginnings? How are these reflections informing your understandings of and questions about narrative practice?*

*Apprenticing to a Craft*

Online forums for letter-writing provide multiple opportunities to practice revisions in honing letter-writing skills. I post the following question to encourage the students:

> *Today in class we spent some time crafting a "Take 2" of letters written to Meghan in response to having viewed the DVD of the conversation about our work together. Thank you to those of you who gave me these handwritten revisions. I really appreciate the specific ways you illustrate shifting from "telling" to "asking" in these letters. This is the forum for any of you to post any other newly crafted letters ("Take 2" or even "Take 3") and/or to share any reflections on letter-writing. What has been particularly interesting to you about our focus on letter-writing in this course? What do you find yourself pondering? How (if at all) do you think this practice might influence your work outside of this course?*

When we repeat an in-class exercise, I create online space for further reflections:

> *During our final class, we did a "Take 2" of an interviewing exercise, as a way to practice the statement of position map. Thank you Sherry, Bobbi, Danielle, and Michelle for being our volunteers. This space is for reflections on this exercise. Bobbi, Danielle, and Michelle, as our scribes, would you be willing to share with us here what you wrote down about our questions? What was it like to be the scribe and is there anything about this experience that you'd like to write about? Sherry, what lingering thoughts about this experience would you be willing to share with us?*
>
> *What was it like for the rest of you to participate in this group exercise, and what are your lingering thoughts and questions? Would you recommend doing this exercise again and if so, are there any specific adaptations with which you would like to experiment?*

In Chapter Eleven, I further explore ways in which students apprentice themselves to the craft of letter-writing.

*Inspiration and Provocation*

I always create an online forum for students to share writings they consider their personal favorites: "Here is space for anyone to share inspirational (and/or

provocative) poems, parables, songs, quotes, and any other modes of expression that engage the heart, mind and soul."

I am often struck by the common threads that link our lives and the generosity with which students share with each other when asked. Students freely share passages from their favorite novels, poems, songs or philosophers. Lynn offered a favorite quote by David Whyte that hangs in her home and work offices: "Whatever the hour of the day in our work, we must do the right thing in the right way, for the right end; work that makes sense of the hours that we are privileged to live."

As a participant in a Unlearning Racism Group, Sandra shared several poems that they had melded together into a beautiful spoken word piece.

"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time.
But, if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine
then let us work together."
Lila Watson

"We are afraid to rock the boat in which we hope to drift safely through
life's currents, when, actually, the boat is stuck on a sandbar. We would be
better off to rock the boat, and try to shake it loose, or, better still,
jump in the water and swim to shore."
Thomas Szasz

"What a delight it is to respect people!"
Anton Chekhov

"When I despair,
I remember there have been tyrants and murderers,
and for a time they seem invincible,
but in the end, they always fall.
Think of it, always."
Mahatma Gandhi

"I used to be a discipline problem,
which caused me embarrassment
until I realized that being a discipline problem in a racist society
is sometimes an honor."
Ishmael Reed

*Course Assignments*

In addition to online forums, the course website offers opportunities for students to post and reflect on written assignments. I describe in detail my favorite assignment, "Developing Preferred Stories of Identity," in Chapter Seven. I designed the "Preferred Identity" assignment so that while students were studying outsider witness

practices and definitional ceremonies (White, 1995b), they would experience the communal nature of narrative work with multiple online tellings of their own preferred stories as practitioners. Students apply Michael White's "landscape of identity, landscape of action micro-map of narrative practice" to their own personal stories of identity as practitioners.[15] Based on White's creative adaptation of Jerome Bruner's ideas about the dual landscapes of action and of consciousness (Bruner, 1986, 1990), landscape of action questions encourage people to situate influential events within the past, present, and future. Landscape of identity questions inquire into the meaning of developments that occur in actions, which can include perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, speculations, realizations, and conclusions (White, 1988).

Each student constructs a "personal micro-map" and a letter of commitment. The course website makes it possible to post the assignment instructions, illustrations from prior students' work and space for questions and/reflections. I assign students to online small groups where they post both parts of this assignment, as attachments. In addition, they are expected to read and post a brief reflection for the written materials posted by each member of their small group:

> *Each of you will be assigned to one of 5-6 online small groups where you will post the class assignment. In addition, you are expected to read and post a brief reflection for posted work by each member of your small group. The logistical details will be decided during our next class.*

I give students the choice of either posting their first assignments online or sending them to me privately. I hope they will take the risk of having their stories of identity as social workers publicly witnessed. However, I do not want anyone to feel pressured to do so. Nor do I want technological worries to be the deciding factor. Most students choose to post online, but I make sure that they know their options are open:

> *Many of you have now joined online small groups where you will post the class assignment. In addition, you are expected to read and post a brief reflection for posted work by each member of your small group. One group – Chappell, Kim, and Heidi – has chosen to share their reflections in person rather than online. Several students have opted not to join small groups, rather to keep this exercise more personal for themselves. Whether privately, in class, or online, I hope we can share some of these experiences with each other in class. Here is space for reflections about your experiences of various aspects of this assignment. I believe this is going to be an engaging assignment within a very busy week. Enjoy!*

Often, the words that make the difference come not from the instructor, but from a classmate. When Steve posted reflections on how much he enjoyed the exercise and learning about himself through it, he described how it "hardly felt like an assignment." He then encouraged others to share their maps, created and posted by computer as "a means to deepen our understanding of each others' unique stories

and commitment to this art of social work." For anyone with questions, he offered to give pointers on how to design a map in Microsoft Word. In fact, the only times students did not post their work online seemed due to technological difficulties. I was awestruck by the quality of the students' maps and letters. One of the most perplexing aspects of writing this book has been choosing just a few illustrations from a myriad of possibilities.

## STUDENTS AS CO-PILOTS

An interactive course website makes it possible to continually check in with students about their course experiences in order to co-create what emerges. After a given class, I start an online topic inviting students to engage in conversation on our recent shared experience. I listen carefully to what the students tell me; their reflections actively shape the emerging course structure, climate, and expectations. I bring forward what I learn from students each semester into how I structure future courses, building on the accumulating knowledge.

While involving students in shaping the course, I also do plenty of upfront planning. I take seriously my role in setting up the structure for an interactive space for shared learning. I want to involve students in making sure that the environment and methods are most conducive to their participation and sharing with one another in ways that will best help them learn and benefit from the course. However, I don't just throw out my syllabus in favor of giving a forum to whatever students want to discuss. I also let in students on my teaching challenge to do justice to the multiple theoretical and epistemological developments in the field of family therapy in preparation for teaching specific narrative practices.

I regularly post my intentions for a given class and ask students for any requests. The post goes something like this, "Here is what I am planning. How does that sound to you? What else would you prefer? While I cannot promise to incorporate all suggestions, I am most interested to hear what you think." Students respond with many excellent suggestions. They want experiential activities, role plays and practice with questions. They also appreciate illustrations in class and in their assigned reading. Often they give me concrete suggestions on bringing more practice and less lecture into our classroom meetings. Students not only give their own ideas, but respond to and build on one another's suggestions, all of which helps me structure the class in the way that they see as most beneficial to 1) create a collaborative learning community and 2) deepen their learning.

### *Class Rituals*

As the course progresses, I give multiple opportunities for students to create class rituals. Students have excellent suggestions for both celebration and meaningful activities. Danielle captured the spirit of collaboration in this class in making the following suggestion while also asking classmates for their ideas. After reading about ceremonies, celebrations and acknowledgements (Morgan, 2000a), she asked her classmates: "As you look at this class, what would be a fitting celebration for

you to acknowledge what you have experienced over the last 5 weeks?" I then compiled the suggestions into a proposed plan for the last day of class. I added:

> *Is there anything you'd like to see happen on the last day of class? Danielle and I have created one plan for the last class (under "applications" /"ceremonies and celebrations"). Let me know any other thoughts you might have. We really haven't had sufficient class time to discuss the readings for this course. I'd like to do something the last day with the eight articles assigned for the last day of class (these are listed on the syllabus). Could each of you commit to reading at least two of these articles? We can then share with each other some of what we've learned from these readings. Here too, let me know if you have any suggestions.*

*Leftovers*

I encourage students to keep talking online even after the final class. Students are welcome to post anywhere. I start a leftovers forum: "Here is a space for whatever is leftover and still yearns to be said." Some course websites remains active for a week or two after the course ends. Students can continue to refer back to reread conversation and consult resources for as long as they have access to the website.

> *You've all now left – it's nearly 6 pm and I'm about to head home. The classroom feels rather empty without you all. I know that I have so many more questions and reflections to offer but right now I am not remembering what I wanted to say. Please don't hesitate to linger a bit longer in this rich conversation. What do you find yourself thinking about as you digest today's class? What were your thoughts about the (MastersWork) Lorraine Hedtke video, "Grief Takes a Holiday"? What stands out to you as we approach the finish line of this course?*

## CONTRIBUTION OF AN INTERACTIVE WEBSITE

I have found that the ease with which students weigh in on the quality of their learning experience is a unique and valuable aspect of the online approach, which clearly sets it apart from the classroom. The comments that students share online – their discomfort, enthusiasm, excitement, trepidation, and so on – greatly contribute to the sense that we are co-creating a learning community. Contrary to students' expressed concern about looking into a screen detracting from a positive learning environment, posting their thoughts on the course website seems to be a safer, more comfortable way for students to reflect on the teaching methods as opposed to focusing solely on content. This is one way in which I see the online resource as far more than just another communication tool – it has opened up a whole new dimension of participation and shared commitment to creating a collaborative learning environment.

While there is necessarily a certain amount of trial and error, my students have been quite forgiving. I consciously hold myself back from being in the center of

online conversation, and find that students ably cultivate their own conversations without me. In fact, my voice as instructor seems to be only slightly elevated, which is different than what generally occurs in a classroom. Together we experience the democratization of the online medium, which is conducive to being equals in sharing a love of learning, a quest for knowledge, and opportunities for practice. There emerges a great sense of "we're all in this together."

### *Adjusting to the Changes*

An interactive website provides a medium to explore and experiment with innovative teaching practices based on collaborative and relational ways of learning. With careful preparation and monitoring, the classroom that extends into cyberspace can become a playground and learning lab. As teacher, I am vitally engaged in dialogue that often transports me into new territories of learning. Simultaneously, I am responsible for structuring the flow and direction of conversation. I am accountable to course and workshop learning goals.

Reviewers of this chapter asked me to say more about my own experiences in shifting teaching paradigms: "Have you always taught in these ways? How did the old way raise its head or try to pull you back, with you, with your students and with the student-teacher relationship? What has helped you to make these changes? How do you fit in technology while preserving a sense of balance in your life?"

I have always been drawn to collaborative ways of working. As a human service provider, therapist, manager, organizational consultant and teacher, I am more comfortable in the role of facilitator than as expert. Whenever possible, I like to build dialogue and create bridges between people and to cross-pollinate ideas. Thus, the transition in teaching from "sage on the stage to the guide on the side" and toward networking is not a big a jump for me. I cannot speak to what this adjustment might be like for other teachers less comfortable with these changes. Technology breaks down the traditional hierarchy. The more traditional teaching strategies one is used to employing, the more challenging the introduction of educational technology will likely be.

I have been using an interactive website since 2001. Strangely, I now have trouble recalling what it was like teaching prior to this innovation. Email correspondence with friends and colleagues around the world has also become an integral aspect of my life and work. However, interacting in person with people in my daily life is also very important to me. I live rurally and deeply value an outdoor life where technology has no place. I try to closely monitor that balance.

Once I experienced firsthand the online possibilities, I became an enthusiastic convert. Maybe parenting is an apt metaphor. Non-parents might ask, "Why on earth would you choose to do something that takes so much work and poses such a time squeeze?" The extra work is secondary to the complex web of life-enriching contributions.

Most of my struggles along the way are related to frustrations in becoming familiar with technical details. I am far from a technological whiz and every step has developed through trial and error. Sometime in the 1990s, I realized that

educational technology is here to stay – and I would miss out on a lot if I chose to ignore it. I made a conscious decision to stay open to possibilities. I am glad I have, and appreciate the opportunity to share my excitement and the strategies that have worked for me with readers of this book.

At the same time, I try to remember my privileges. By now, I have more than 15 years of experience with computer technology. I own a desktop and a laptop. I have high speed Internet service at home and at my office. I am a fast typist. I know resources to call on when in need of help.

While I embrace technology as a tool to reinforce my teaching principles (see Chapter Three, "Teaching Congruently"), I do not want my teaching to become dominated by technology. In fact, this is a possibility I intentionally guard against. For example, I pay attention to the interaction between technology and the teaching space. The configuration of technologically-enhanced classrooms can either reinforce or distract from collaborative teaching goals. In my experience, many technology support people do not appreciate the nuances of creating a safe comfortable environment that encourages conversations. I have moved out of many assigned classrooms in search of space that is an encouragement, not an impediment, to good conversation. When in doubt, I would always take a comfortable learning space before technology. Hopefully, I won't have to make that choice.

### *Teaching Challenges*

An interactive website engages students to become active participants in their own learning. Yet the online medium does not motivate every student to take on rigorous study and practice of course materials. My highly motivated and hard-working students are not solely a reflection on my teaching skills and ability to engage them; the make-up of some classes works better than others. As with classroom teaching, some students are enthusiastic but unable to devote the necessary time. Others are distracted, or their interest in the course content is not fully sparked. Some who are initially reticent become more involved over time, once the online conversations get going. I have heard from several students who reviewed this manuscript that I kindled an intrigue with narrative therapy that lay dormant until a few years later when something shifted in their work lives.

I keep a close watch on the student make-up of a given course. Are most of them more interested in talking about guest speakers than discussing course materials? Do nearly all actually complete the readings? Have I given them too much free rein in their assignments? Is their thinking getting sufficiently challenged? Who is getting left behind? Whose voice is not being heard?

I find that the interactive course website gives additional opportunities for the teacher to get to know students' individual learning needs. By listening in to their discussion on online forums, I am repeatedly stunned by how quickly I become intimately acquainted with students, not only their names but their thinking, study habits, and particular interest areas. Because I consider it essential that I quickly connect online voices to classroom faces, for the first few classes, I ask students to use name tags.

Is creating an interactive website too much work? I have often heard teachers lament that they don't know how they could add something so labor-intensive into their teaching. It does take a significant investment of time to construct an interactive website, set up online forums, and regularly monitor conversation. Yet for me, creating and participating in the website is energizing; it so enriches the collaborative learning community I strive for that it is well worth the effort. Once the structure is in place, I experience joy and intrigue in performing teaching tasks that otherwise might feel laborious and protracted. I can't imagine going back to "before the course website."