VANCOUVER SCHOOL for NARRATIVE THERAPY
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A (short) Glossary Of Narrative Therapy Terms

- Alternative Stories: Also called counter-stories. Narrative therapists are interested in the unknown more than the accepted known. They will often interact with and act with purpose to undermine numerous so-called 'factual' and overwhelming thin conclusions of problem stories/orientations told by the people who come to see them in therapy. Narrative therapists are more interested in conversations that seek out alternative stories that are identified by the person in therapy as stories they would like to live their lives through. The therapist is interested in creating sustainable conversations supporting preferred stories of identity that assist people to break from the influence of the problems they are facing.

- Anti-individualism: Modern psychology is based in individualism, narrative therapy is based in anti-individualism. Contemporary philosophy is dominated by anti- individualism, which holds that a subject's thoughts, meaning and expression (etc) are a relational response to discursive and a cultural context and not determined by what is apriori - inside her head. The fact that the utterances and thoughts of a person have a certain content and refer to certain things, states, or events in the world is determined not only by her brain state, but also by her relations to her linguistic community, dominant norms and her physical environment.

- Archive: This is a technical term Foucault uses in The Archaeology of Knowledge. It designates the collection of all material traces left behind by a particular historical period and culture.

- Body: Narrative therapy is particularly concerned with the relations between political power and the body, and analyses various historical ways of training the body to make it socially productive. The body is an element to be managed in relation to strategies of the economic and social management of populations. This body description is the one taken up by the Vancouver Anti-anorexia League.

- Critical Ethnography - Critical ethnography is a perspective through which a researcher can ask questions. It attempts to free researchers from ideologies that detract from informed reportage. Critical ethnography adopts a complex theoretical orientation toward culture. Culture--in collectives of differing magnitude, whether educational institutions, student communities, classrooms, etc. - is treated as heterogeneous, conflictual, negotiated, and evolving, as distinct from unified, cohesive, fixed, and static. Also, in contrast with a relativistic view of cultures as different-but-equal, critical ethnography explicitly assumes that cultures are positioned unequally in power relations.

- Community of Discourse - A discourse community can be defined as people who share similar thoughts and ideas. The fan base of the Rolling Stones for example, might constitute a discourse community. Within this fan base, certain attitudes would be considered unacceptable and outside of the community. For example, someone who did not hold the song Brown Sugar in the same high esteem as other members of the discursive community may be divided off.

- Cultural Hegemony . Cultural Hegemony is the philosophic concept originated by Antonio Gramsci that suggests a culturally diverse society can be ruled or dominated by one of itís social classes ñ bringing forth dominance of one social group over another.

- Decentred therapeutic posture: The notion "decentred" in narrative therapy does not refer to the intensity of the therapist's engagement (emotional or otherwise) with people seeking consultation, but to the therapist's achievement in according priority to the personal stories and to the knowledges and skills of these people. People have a "primary authorship" status in therapy, and the knowledges and skills that have been generated in the history of their lives are the principal considerations

- Deconstruction: Deconstruction is an approach, introduced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida. It is an approach that may be deployed in therapy, philosophy literary analysis , or other fields. Deconstruction generally tries to demonstrate that any text (story) is not a discrete whole but contains several irreconcilable and contradictory meanings; that any text therefore has more than one interpretation; that the text itself links these interpretations inextricably; that the incompatibility of these interpretations is irreducible; and thus that an interpretative reading cannot go beyond a certain point. Paul Ricoeur is another prominent supporter and interpreter of Derrida's philosophy. He defines deconstruction as a way of uncovering the questions behind the answers of a text or tradition.

- Definitional ceremony: The definitional ceremony metaphor structures the therapeutic arena as a context for the rich description of people's lives, identities and relationships. Michael White was introduced to this work through David Epston and used the definitional ceremony metaphor from the work of Barbara Myerhoff (1982,1986), a cultural anthropologist.

- Discipline: Discipline is a mechanism of power which regulates the behaviour of individuals in the social body. This is done by regulating the organization of space (architecture etc.), of time (timetables) and people's activity and behaviour (drills, posture, movement). It is enforced with the aid of complex systems of surveillance. Foucault emphasizes that power is not discipline, rather discipline is simply one way in which power can be exercised.

- Discourse: My book on narrative therapy uses the term discourse to mean - what gets to be said, who gets to say it and with what authority. However, the term

discourse has several definitions. Sociologists and philosophers tend to use the term discourse to describe the conversations and the meaning behind them by a group of people who hold certain ideas in common. Such is the definitions by philosopher Michel Foucault, who holds discourse to be the acceptable statements made by a certain type of discourse community.

- Discursive Practice: A discursive practices are all the ways a culture creates social and psychological realities. This term refers to a historically and culturally specific set of rules for organizing and producing different forms of knowledge. It is not a matter of external determinations being imposed on people's thought, rather it is a matter of rules which, a bit like the grammar of a language, allow certain statements to be made.

- Experience: Experience can be defined as an interrelation between knowledge, types of normativity and subjectivity in a particular culture at a particular time.

- Externalizing: White and Epston observed that therapeutic progress was enhanced when the therapist and person were able to talk about the problem in a more relational and contextualized way. Narrative Therapy uses a method of externalizing problems to bring forth possible re-descriptions and the chance for clients to reposition themselves with the problem. The identity of the described problem is viewed as separate from the identities of the person. In this process, the problem becomes a separate relational entity within a context of power/knowledge and thus external to the person or relationship that was ascribed as the problem. Those problems that are considered to be ëinherentí, as well as those relatively fixed qualities that are attributed to persons and to relationships, are rendered less fixed and less restricting. Externalizing of the problem enables persons to separate from the dominant stories that have been shaping their lives and relationships. Externalizing is by no means a requirementí of narrative therapy and represents one option within a range of narrative practices

- Genealogy: Michel Foucault's concept of genealogy is the history of the position of the subject which traces the development of people and society (and in this case narrative therapy questions, ideas, concepts) through history.

- Heteronormativity: Is a term for a set of lifestyle that hold that people fall into distinct and complementary genders female with natural roles in life. It also holds that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation, and states that sexual and marital relations are most (or only) fitting between a man and a woman. Consequently, a "heteronormative" view is one that promotes alignment of biological gender identity, and gender roles to what is now called "the gender binary."

- Ideology: Ideology translates to the science or study of ideas. However, ideology tends to refer to the way in which people think about the world and their ideal concept of how to live in the world. For example, in US politics, the term

ideology may separate the difference between Democrat and Republican, Conservative and NDP, and those sharing the ideology of one group over another are likely to vote accordingly. Usually a culture has multiple political ideologies, with some less popular than others. Many have difficulty seeing past the two competing ideologies to examine other political ideologies present in the culture. For example, few Libertarians, Green Party Members, or Peace and Freedom ideologists are elected, since most think in terms of democrat and republican candidates only.

- Indeterminacy: Indeterminacy is in the subjunctive mood since it is that which is not yet settled, concluded, or known. It is all that may be, might be, could be, and perhaps even should be. The underlying quality of social life should be considered to be one of theoretical absolute indeterminacy. The relation of indeterminacy to the subjunctive mood is also discussed by J. Bruner (1986).

- Institutions: Foucault notes that institutions are a way of freezing particular relations of power so that a certain number of people are advantaged.

- Knowledge Practice: A knowledge practice viewed as 'truth' within a cultural discourse and sets standards for the specifications of the individual, around which the individual shapes his or her life.

- Landscape of action: Epston and White took this term from the work of Jerome Bruner (Acts of Meaning, 19190). Landscape of action questions center on events that happened in a person's telling of their lives and links these events through time - forming a plot line. These questions are organized through events, circumstance, sequence, time and plot.

- Landscape of identity: Epston and White took this term from the work of Jerome Bruner (Acts of Meaning, 19190). Landscape of identity questions are (in part) those that are asked regarding what the client might conclude about the action, sequences and themes described in response to the landscape of action questions. Landscape of identity questions also bring forth relevant categories addressing cultural identities, intentional understandings, learnings and realizations.

- Non-essentialism: The concept of non-essentialism was famously expanded upon by Michel Foucault in his History of Sexuality, in which he argues that even gender and sexual orientation are contrived formations, and that our concept of essentialist notions of gender or sexuality is flawed. For example, he argues that the entire class of homosexuality is in fact quite recent, built up by cultural norms and an interplay between different groups in society, but with no more essential a quality than, for example, the idea of beauty.

- Normal and the pathological, normalization: Contemporary society is a society based on medical notions of the norm, rather than on legal notions of conformity to codes and the law. Hence criminals need to be 'cured' of a disease not punished

for an infraction of the law. There is an insoluble tension between a system based on law and a system based on medical norms in our legal and medical institutions.

- Performance: When discussing the performance aspects of ritual process, anthropologist Victor Turner (1976) suggests that performance, literally means to furnish completely or thoroughly. To perform is thus to bring something about, to consummate something, or to carry out a play, order, or project. But in the carrying out, one holds something and the new may be generated. The performance transforms itself.

- Postmodernism: In critical theory and philosophy, postmodernism serves as a striking counterpoint to classical foundations of philosophy. While earlier philosophers and theorists were devoted to the ongoing exploration of a universal system, postmodernists focus on the role of that search in creating what is known as truth itself. To most postmodernist theorists, it is the discourse itself that gives rise to any sort of perceived universality.

- Post-structuralism: Post-structuralism grew as a response to structuralism's perceived assumption that its own system of analysis was somehow essentialist. Post-structuralists hold that in fact even in an examination of underlying structures, a slew of biases introduce themselves, based on the conditioning of the examiner. At the root of post-structuralism is the rejection of the idea that there is any truly essential form to a cultural product, as all cultural products are by their very nature formed, and therefore artificial.

- Power/Knowledge: One of the most important features of Narrative Therapy is that mechanisms of power produce different types of knowledge which collate information on people's activities and existence. The knowledge gathered in this way further reinforces exercises of power. The DSM and the use of client files are examples of these techniques as a form of social control. Foucault's work cautions that what we may take to be knowledge, may instead be nothing more than powerful concepts perpetuated by authorities and those concepts may change our understanding of our selves and our world.

- Power: Power is not a thing but a relation, power is not simply repressive but it is productive, power is not simply a property of the State. Power is not something that is exclusively localized in government and the State (which is not a universal essence). Rather, power is exercised throughout the social body. Power operates at the most micro levels of social relations. Power is omnipresent at every level of the social body.

- Re-authoring conversations: Re-authoring conversations re-invigorate peoples efforts to understand what it is that is happening in their lives, what it is that has happened, how it has happened, and what it all means. In this way, these conversations encourage a dramatic re- engagement with life and with history,

and provide options for people to more fully inhabit their lives and their relationships. Questions are introduced that encourage people to generate new proposals for action, accounts of the circumstances likely to be favourable to these proposals for action, and predictions about the outcome of these proposals.

- Re-membering conversations: Re-membering conversations (Myerhoff 1990) are not about passive recollection, but about purposive engagements with the significant figures of oneís history, and with the identities of oneís present life who are significant or potentially significant. These figures and identities do not have to be directly known in order to be identified as significant to persons lives.

- Re-storying: The therapeutic notion of re-storying creates the possibility that change is always possible. Therefore, any totalized description of a person's past, present or future can be reconfigured, recollected and re-remembered differently.

- 'Self': While different post-structural thinkers' views on the self vary, the self under study is said to be constituted by discourse(s). Narrative therapy's approach to the 'self' stretches out beyond the more popular and/or generalized accounts of who person's are (e.g. dominant and/or individualized categories of personhood), and of who the person is stated or labeled to be by the expert of psychological knowledge.

- Social constructionism: (Gergen, 1990) A major focus of social constructionism is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived social reality. It involves looking at the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalized, and made into tradition by humans. A socially constructed reality is one that is seen as an ongoing, dynamic process that is reproduced by people acting on their interpretations
- and their knowledge of it.

- Story: White and Epston pursued the work of strory through Jerome Bruner (1990). Stories determine the meaning given to experience. Stories enable persons to link aspects of their experience through the dimension of time (past/present/future). There does not appear to be any other mechanism for the structuring of experience that so captures the sense of lived time, or that can adequately represent the sense of lived time. It is through stories that we obtain a sense of our lives changing. It is through stories that we are able to gain a sense of the unfolding of the events of our lives through recent history, and it appears that this sense is vital to the perception of a 'future' that is in any way different from a ëpresentí. Stories construct beginnings and endings; they impose beginnings and endings on the flow of experience. We perform these stories into lived experience and meaning.

- Structuralism: Structuralists look at the foundational structures implicit in all productions of a culture, and undertake an analysis of the many parts that create

something, to get a better understanding of the creation. The basic premise of structuralism is that all things have a structure below the level of meaning, and that this structure constitutes the reality of that thing. The vast majority of psychological practices are based in structuralism.

- Subject: The subject is an entity which is self-aware and capable of choosing how to act. Foucault was consistently opposed to nineteenth century and phenomenological notions of a universal and timeless subject which was at the source of how one made sense of the world, and which was the foundation of all thought and action. The problem with this conception of the subject according to Foucault and other thinkers in the 1960s, was that it fixed the status quo and attached people to specific identities that could never be changed.

- Text analogy: The text analogy proposes that meaning is derived from the storying of our experience. And it is the stories that persons tell that determines meaning about their lives.

- Totalization techniques: Totalization techniques are culturally produced notions about the specification of personhood.

- Unique Outcomes: Unique outcomes is a term coined by Irving Goffman (1961) and provides a starting point for re- authoring conversations. They make available a point of entry into the alternative story lines of people's lives that, at the outset of these conversations, become visible as thin traces, which are full of gaps, and are not clearly named. As these conversations proceed, therapists build a scaffold through questions that encourage people to fill
- these gaps. Through a telling of a re-authored story people are able to identify previously neglected but vital aspects of lived experiences - aspects that could not have been predicted from a reading of the dominant problem story.

- Vancouver School for Narrative Therapy: established in 1992 by Stephen Madigan PhD as the *first* Narrative Therapy Training site in the northern hemisphere. VSNT offers certificate training programs in Narrative Therapy - go to www.therapeuticconversations.com.

- Universal categories: Narrative therapy is firmly and consistently opposed to the notion of universal categories and essences, 'things' that existed in unchanged form in all times and places such as the State, madness, sexuality, criminality and so on. These things only acquire a real (and changing) existence as the result of specific historical activities and reflection.