

## Editorial

By John Winslade



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Welcome to this first edition of *Explorations: An E-Journal of Narrative Practice!* Thank you for joining us in celebrating the public birth of this new project. We value your participation as readers and we look forward to and invite your responses as contributors.

Welcome to you, wherever you are in the world! It is our intention that this e-journal become a beacon of international collaboration around narrative practice.

As we put together the first edition of this e-journal, we are trying to imagine where you might be, what country you live in, what professional interests bring you to this site, and what personal life stories coalesce around your interest in narrative practice. We are indeed curious about what might be drawing you to read narrative work. It is our hope that this e-journal will publish a wide-range of stories and perspectives and we hope you may contribute to this.

As you may know, narrative therapy developed first in Australia and New Zealand and has since expanded into many parts of the world. Founded initially, over twenty five years ago, in the creative family therapy practice of David Epston and Michael White, narrative ideas are now being engaged by practitioners of a wide range of disciplines, in a variety of forms, and in many countries. There are, however, some key central principles to narrative practice. On the occasion of the publication of this first edition it seems relevant to point to these principles.

Narrative practice is an expression of a profound respect for persons and for their right to have a say, individually or collectively, in shaping their own lives.

Narrative practice assumes that people's lives are powerfully shaped by multiple intersecting stories, and that people form identities, relationships and communities through these stories.

The aphorism, '*The problem is the problem; the person is not the problem*', is central to narrative practice. It signifies a rejection of the common practice of pathologising persons, individually or as whole communities, and communicates a valuing of persons as more than capable of speaking to their own hopes and dreams for their own lives.

Narrative practice takes account of practices of power in the world and understands power to be present in relations between people in all interactions at every level. Power might be expressed through the laying down of dividing lines between people (for example, along lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, and so on) or through the control of the meanings that govern the life of a person or of a community. Narrative practitioners seek to make visible these operations of power, to deconstruct their effects, and to enhance the agency of those with whom we work.

Narrative practice is also about the expression of hope through recognising that there are always counter stories that exist in the face of the negative effects of dominant stories in people's lives. Narrative practices are used to seek out such counter stories, to richly describe them and to authenticate them in ways that create new possibilities for action.

While there are many other points that could be made, let us leave these principles at this point, and spell out more explicitly the concept of this e-journal and its history.

## **How this e-journal has come to be**

For some time I have thought that further outlets for literature on narrative practice have been needed. As a teacher I have often seen very good student work that I would like to see taken to the next level and published for others to read. I have also seen and experienced the many benefits that accrue to people's practice when they take the extra step of turning good work into writing and open it to the responses of others. Cheryl White and others at the Dulwich Centre have also expressed a desire for a new publication to cater for readers in many parts of the world who may be new to narrative practice and who often may not have access to written publications. Often these practitioners have no connection with any of the history of the development of narrative practices but are curious and hungry to learn.

And so, we have developed this e-journal that will be friendly to new writers, including student writers, and will help them to take the next step in developing their work in a written article. It will also be friendly and accessible to new readers from many different parts of the world. At the same time we intend to make room for publishing work by more practiced writers and to stimulate the practice of those who are more widely read in narrative practice. It seems there is a hunger for narrative material and that this is growing and needs to be constantly stimulated.

The importance of this agenda came more sharply into focus in the wake of Michael White's death in 2008. If narrative practice is to continue to grow, then it needs to not be the preserve of one generation of writers. The therapy field in general has witnessed a series of developments over the last hundred years that have been tied too closely to one or two persons and have not continued to grow after those persons' deaths. Michael White has made a massive contribution to the growth of these practices. David Epston continues to make similar contributions and to

carry a torch for Michael as well as for narrative practice. But there is a big need for other people to pick up this torch and run with it, sometimes in completely new directions. It is heartening that many are already doing this. There is a need for a new generation of leaders of narrative practice to emerge and to gain prominence. It is one of our hopes for this e-journal that it will serve to encourage the emergent writings of such people.

Why an online journal? The main reason for this journal being published online is simply to enable access to the widest range of people. We live in an exciting time in this regard in which there are new publishing opportunities made possible by online journal formats!

From these initial hopes, this e-journal has been developed.

## **Welcoming a wide range of contributions**

There are a wide range of domains of narrative practice that have developed in recent years. It is no longer sufficient to think of narrative work as family therapy, although working with families is still common and family therapy remains the field from which narrative practice emerged. For this e-journal we have decided on a series of editorial sections, although not all of these may be represented in each edition. These sections are as follows:

- Narrative therapy and supervision
- Community work and social action
- Client and community knowledges
- Research
- Conflict Resolution and Peace-building
- Education and Training
- Reviews

We welcome submissions in any of these areas as long as they feature a clear narrative perspective.

We are hoping to receive many hopeful, creative papers from both experienced and new authors. While we are willing to entertain intellectually robust material, articles should be couched in easy-to-read language. They may be explorations of practice that incorporate some new possibilities, explore new descriptions, address important dilemmas, or present fresh ideas. They may be conceptual articles that draw from a narrative, poststructuralist or social constructionist perspective. There is also room for interviews with established narrative practitioners by newer practitioners.

Narrative practice also needs to be supported by ongoing research in order to be able to claim and justify its contribution. We therefore welcome research articles that focus on narrative practice. Such research may be conducted within qualitative or quantitative research paradigms. Examples of research conducted on the foundation of ideas that are related to narrative assumptions are especially important. This means that research along the lines of discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and ethnography (including auto-ethnography) are especially welcome.

There will also be a review section in which we shall publish reviews of books, conferences, and other events of interest to narrative practitioners. To signal the variety of reviews we shall publish, the first edition includes a review of a website.

We are also interested in considering articles that push narrative practices into new domains (for example, into the business world or into coaching) or into new territories. This first edition includes an article on the emergence of a small narrative community in Poland. You will notice that this article is written in English (which will continue to be the main language of the e-journal) but also is accompanied by a Polish version. The practice of publishing work in more than one language is one that we want to continue, so we are signalling it in this first edition.

We also want people to have a chance to represent their own experience, rather than have authors representing the experiences of others. At the very least, this means that, wherever appropriate, anyone referred to has had a chance to read and reflect on the ways they have been represented. We also aim to take care with the politics of representation in relation to issues of gender, class, race, sexual preference, culture, ability, and age.

Some of the papers we publish will not be written from the standpoint of 'professional knowledge', but instead contain the stories, perspectives, and ideas of those who have sought counselling, or are involved in community organising. These perspectives from 'outside' the professional realm make a significant contribution to refreshing and reconceptualising therapeutic and community work practice. In the first edition, there is an article that is co-authored by a therapist and a therapy client. It consists mainly of the therapist interviewing the client about helpful developments in her life. We are conscious of signalling that we would like to publish more such articles in future.

In response to this first edition, we will also welcome your letters and emails and will maintain a letters column for this purpose. Our hope is that this will develop into a site for ongoing discussion of narrative ideas and practices.

We hope this editorial conveys a sense of the kind of e-journal we envisage emerging. The e-journal will, of course, take on its own particular shape through processes that are (in Deleuze's terms) rhizomatic<sup>1</sup>. It will, we hope, become a journal in a constant state of becoming, often in ways which we cannot determine in advance. We hope this produces a sense of excitement for readers, writers and editors.

## **The editing and publishing team**

Publishing is a collective process. And this e-journal involves contributes from many countries. Our inaugural editorial team includes people from Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and Russia. Let us now introduce you to this editorial team. The publisher is Dulwich Centre Publications. Based in Adelaide, Australia, Dulwich Centre Publications will take overall legal ownership and responsibility for the journal, its website and copyright issues. Cheryl White represents the publisher on the editorial team. I, John Winslade, am the Managing editor. We have an initial team of section editors processing articles in the various domains of publication. They are: David Denborough, Sekneh Beckett, David Paré, Kathie Crocket and Daria Kutuzova. Mark Trudinger is handling the technical aspects of the e-journal's production.

This e-journal is fully peer reviewed. The advantage of this is that it helps to get narrative practice accepted as legitimate in academic circles. This in turn means that the journal will be more likely to be picked up by the databases that circulate knowledges internationally. In the end this means that articles about narrative practice will be read by more people. Each piece of writing in this first edition has been read by a number of people. We do this in an effort to forecast the paper's possible effects on a range of different readers; to check accuracy; to

provide feedback for improvement; to address the politics of representation; and so on. All this can be challenging for an author but we still hope that the review process will remain invigorating and lead to a high quality of writing. For this first edition, the following people have made contributions through reviewing articles: Shona Russell, Jill Freedman, Glen Simblett, Aileen Cheshire, Alfonso Diaz-Smith, Gaye Stockell, Marc Leger, Ruth Pluznick, Ruth Walter, Natalia Savelieva, and Gerald Monk.

Putting together this first issue has involved practitioners from Canada, France, Australia, Poland, New Zealand, USA, Mexico and Russia! Future issues are likely to include material from Africa, Australasia, the Americas, the Middle East, Asia and Europe. We are particularly interested in generating articles from perspectives/communities/cultures whose work and ideas are often under-represented.

Please enjoy the first edition of this new e-journal and give thought to expressing your response in writing, either as a letter or as an article for future editions. While this first edition sets out to signal some aspects of our intentions, it does not by any means capture all of what this e-journal will become. That is evident by the range of articles already in preparation for the next edition! We look forward to your responses and contributions.

John Winslade.

## **Note**

1. A rhizome may be thought of as a plant that spreads horizontally and lays down new roots as it grows rather than relying on a singular taproot.