

# **NARRATIVE THERAPY**

## **CPSY 590**

### **Summer, 2010**

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*“This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his life as if he were telling a story.”*

**Jean-Paul Sartre**

#### **Catalogue Description:**

This course covers the theory and practice of narrative therapy. The use of questioning techniques to deconstruct clients’ “problem-saturated” stories and the use of externalizing conversations to re-author alternative stories will be discussed and practiced. How internalized cultural discourse and modern practices of power can oppress and constrain clients’ abilities to make desired change will also be examined. The primary focus of the course will be on the application of narrative therapy in work with families.

#### **Course Objectives:**

Upon completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Describe social constructionist and post-modern perspectives on the development and power of meaning systems.
2. Specify the implications these theories have in regard to counseling practice.
3. Articulate the basic principles of narrative, collaborative and just therapies.
4. Demonstrate beginning proficiency in intervention skills used in narrative therapy including the use of deconstructive questioning, externalizing conversations, re-authoring questions, letters and documents, definitional ceremonies, and the archeology of unique outcomes.
5. Recognize and discuss the ways that dominant discourses can oppress, marginalize, and disempower certain groups and individuals.
6. Use narrative therapy concepts to assess and conceptualize problems within families.
7. Discuss the construction of professional identities and discourses.

#### **Instructional Methods:**

Each class period will consist of a variety of instructional activities including lecture, discussion, role plays, demonstrations, video, and small group experiential exercises.

### **Required Texts:**

Payne, Martin (2006). *Narrative Therapy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Sage Publications, London.  
ISBN: 9781412920131

### **The following readings will be on Moodle:**

Bruner, J. (2004) *The narrative creation of self*. In Angus, L.E. & McLeod, J. (eds) The Handbook of Narrative and Psychotherapy. London: Sage Publications.

Epston, D. (1994) *Extending the conversation*. The Family Therapy Networker, (Nov./Dec., 1994, pp 31-38.

Greenberg, L. & Angus, L. (2004). *The contribution of emotion process to narrative change in psychotherapy: A dialectical constructivist approach*. In Angus, L.E. & McLeod, J. (eds) The Handbook of Narrative and Psychotherapy. London: Sage Publications.

Nylund, D. & Thomas, J.(1994) *The economics of narrative*. The Family Therapy Networker, (Nov./Dec. 1994) pp 40-48.

Sykes-Wiley, M. (1994) *Panning for gold*. The Family Therapy Networker, (Nov./Dec. 1994) pp 40-48.

Tomm, K. (1989) *Externalizing the problem and internalizing personal agency*. Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies, Vol. 8, Spring, 1989.

### **Evaluation:**

Students will be evaluated on successful completion of the following class requirements:

1. Interview transcript: 60 points
2. Narrative letters: 10 points each
3. Class participation: 20 points

Total possible: 100 points

Grading scale: 93-100 = A  
90-92 = A-  
87-89 = B+  
83-86 = B  
80-82 = B-  
77-79 = C+  
73-76 = C

*“We are all tellers of tales. We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories. This is not the stuff of delusion or self-deception. We are not telling ourselves lies. Rather, through our personal myths, each of us discovers what is true and what is meaningful in life. In order to live well, with unity and purpose, we compose a heroic narrative of the self that illustrates essential truths about ourselves. Enduring human truths still reside in myth as they have always done.”*

**Dan McAdams**

### **Assignments:**

1. **Narrative letters:** Throughout the class we will be conducting narrative interviews. You will compose two post-session letters in response to these interviews. Letters are due at the class period following the interview.
2. **Interview transcript:** You will turn in a transcript of a narrative interview. You may use one of the cases we consider in class or use one of the case examples provided by the instructor. Your transcript should demonstrate your grasp of narrative concepts and your ability to engage your client in an externalizing conversation. **Due July 24. Maximum 8 pages.**

*“No one in the world knew what truth was until someone had told a story. It was not there in the moment of lightening or the cry of the beast, but in the story of those things afterwards, making them part of human life. Our distant ancestor gloried as he told – or acted out or danced – the story of the great kill in the dark forest, and the story entered the life of the tribe, and by it the tribe came to know itself. On such a day against the beast we fought and won, and here we live to tell the tale. A tale much embellished but truthful even so, for truth is not simply what happened but how we felt about it when it was happening, and how we feel about it now.”*

**J. Rouse**

### **Class Schedule:**

**July 16:** The theory of Narrative Therapy  
**Read first half of Payne**

**July 17:** Practice of narrative therapy  
**Read: Epston, *Extending the conversation.***  
**Sykes-Wiley, *Panning for gold***  
**Bruner, *The narrative creation of self.***

**July 23: Finish reading Payne**

**Read: Greenberg and Angus, *The contribution of emotion process to narrative change in psychotherapy: A dialectical constructivist approach.***

**Nylund and Thomas, *The economics of narrative.***

**Tomm, *Externalizing the problem and internalizing personal agency.***

**July 24: Interview transcript due.**

*“Stories are useful, not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be defeated.”* **G. K. Chesterton**

*“God made man because he loves stories.”* **Elie Wiesel**