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GENEROUS PEDAGOGY: TEACHING AND LEARNING POSTMODERN THERAPIES

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In assembling this special issue, we decided to plunge into the rabbit hole. Having put the words *teaching* and *postmodern* together in our call for articles, we entered a domain of shifting meanings, a place of ongoing deconstruction and reconstruction. That defiant refusal of firm categorization and final definitions goes with the territory we opted to explore. However, as editors of this special issue, we found it necessary to temporarily "fix" the terms so that we could communicate to prospective readers the approximate outer boundaries of the pieces we were soliciting. So before we introduce you to this collection of bold and inventive essays, we would like to take a moment to reflect on these key terms and our intentions in using them.

In seeking to explore the teaching of postmodern family therapy, we were deliberate in excluding supervision. We realize that the line between teaching and supervision is not always a sharp one; on the other hand, there is a fair body of accumulated literature on postmodern supervision and very little devoted to teaching and training per se. We distinguish "teaching" from "training" mostly in terms of the divide between university-based programs (teaching), where the learning happens as part of ongoing coursework, and the private domain (training), where learning happens in the context of a workshop or some form of ongoing externship. The articles submitted for this special issue cover both domains.

The word *postmodern* rolls off the tongue easily and is widely disseminated these days; because of its wide currency and varied usage, however, the word is not very precise. We chose it to represent a wide swath of contemporary therapeutic practice mostly linked by a critique of approaches that lead to the adoption of an expert stance and that champion themselves by appealing to purportedly universal human change processes, personality dimensions, and the like. We find useful Anderson's (2003) description of the postmodern critique as a "broad umbrella"—a territory of thought and practice under which similar and different traditions meet (Anderson, 1997).

The contributors to this special issue represent different traditions with overlapping commitments: some have backgrounds in social work, others in psychology, some in family therapy, and some in education. They are inspired by the ideas

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of Kenneth Gergen, Paulo Freire, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman, and Donald Schon, among others, and by the work of practitioners like Harlene Anderson, Michael White, David Epston, Tom Andersen, Lynn Hoffman, Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg, and Karl Tomm, to name just a few. The articles that make up this special issue encompass a broad range of concepts and practices. At the same time they share some ideas that can be seen as common threads in the work of the different authors.

As the term *postmodernism* was used in our call for articles, it pointed to three distinct but, as we saw it, related branches of family therapy: narrative, collaborative language systems, and solution-focused therapy. We realize that many narrative practitioners prefer the term *poststructuralist*, and we mean to include post-structuralism under the postmodern umbrella we have erected for this issue. In doing so, we do not mean to be arguing for a particular taxonomy of traditions of thought; our intentions are more pragmatic. We do see quite significant divergences between, for example, the work of Michael White and that of Harlene Anderson. We also feel, however, that the various approaches to the work associated with these two influential practitioners have a certain family resemblance when considered against the backdrop of the field, and we chose "postmodern" to name the family. Other terms that are useful to delineate this shared territory are *collaborative* (Paré & Larner, 2004), *constructive* (Hoyt, 1998), and *discursive* (Strong & Paré, 2004).

Central to that resemblance is that "heart-of-the-matter word," epistemology (Hoffman, 1985, p. 383)—a troubling of a view of knowledge as given, foundational, and representational. The approaches here are more inclined to attend to how knowledge and meaning are *constructed*, largely through language and in relationships, on the broad social landscape, and in the intimacy of the consulting room. The politics of meaning making hover nearby in any such discussion. In some of the writings here, this is foregrounded and expressed in practices aimed at addressing potential power differentials. Other pieces are less explicit in this regard, but all share a respectful, collaborative spirit that reflects a loosened grip on truth claims and purported expertise.

The focus on the social dimensions of knowledge and meaning construction lead to some interesting pedagogical questions for teachers and trainers of therapists. How might we teach conceptual frameworks and therapeutic interventions without simply duplicating modernist traditions that privilege instructors' knowledges? What place do models or preformulated interventions have in a context of multiple meaning and relational knowing? How do prominent postmodern therapeutic concepts and practices translate into pedagogical processes: multiplicity of meaning and multiplicity of self, "not-knowing," exceptions or unique outcomes, relational knowing, dominant and alternative discourse, and so forth? If a postmodern teaching orientation implies the critique of normative standards, how do we evaluate student progress? How do we ensure ethical competence and protection of the public? These questions are addressed in a number of novel ways in the essays gathered here.

In the teaching realm, it is common to talk of knowledge "acquisition" or "transmission," but neither term captures the spirit that permeates the pieces between these covers. Sfard (1998) says that the language of knowledge acquisition leads to a picture of "the human mind as a container to be filled with certain materials" (p. 5) and the learner as owner of these. But postmodern epistemologies lead us to wonder about whose story in particular is being privileged as worthy of "ownership," and they remind us that knowledge is not so much handed over as it is co-constructed through mutual talk. And so postmodernism, as we use the term here, leads to a rethinking not only of therapeutic practices but also of the vital tasks of sharing and critiquing those practices.

We received a large number of excellent submissions for this issue and selected from among them to create a special issue that offers rigor and diversity. Readers will be interested to know that four other fascinating pieces will appear in the months ahead in a special section on teaching family therapy. Our reading of all of the submissions we received suggested to us a number of themes we would like to briefly highlight prior to introducing the articles themselves. Each theme speaks strongly of a dimension of postmodern thought with some real consequences for the teaching and learning of therapeutic theory and practice.

While some articles played more heavily on some themes than others, a constant across all submissions was the isomorphism of the teaching of therapeutic practice with therapeutic practice itself. In other words, postmodernism as we are broadly defining it speaks of a worldview rather than a "model" or "theory" per se, and the result is that the worldview is explicitly evident not just in the content of the teaching but also in the process of teaching. For example, the critique of purported foundational truth encourages instructors to include an emphasis on multiplicity of meaning in the content of courses on therapeutic practice. But it also suggests that this content itself should be open to critique and reflection. And so there is a consistently reflexive aspect to the teaching processes which parallels the reflexivity that is a hallmark of postmodern practice. What follows are some of the prominent themes we discerned among the various contributions.

ATTENTION TO CONTEXT

In keeping with the systemic focus of family therapy, the submissions transcended an individualistic view of persons and ideas. Clients are seen as embedded in social matrices; students are understood as members of communities of practitioners working within broader systems of practice and theory. Attention to context provides an ongoing reminder that therapy is a socially evolved ritual shaped by historical contingencies. It helps to counter a tendency to view teaching and learning as the transmission of what is "known" and instead invites a critical engagement with curricular content.

LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE

One of the main propositions in postmodern thought is that language is "constitutive," that we construct the meaning of our experiences through language. Therapy is seen as conversation, as a discursive process. In the teaching of postmodern therapies, models or schools of therapy can be understood as different discourses to be examined in terms of their history and context, what they include and what they leave out, their implications for practice and their possible effects on clients and therapists.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

An important feature of the practices grouped under the postmodern umbrella is their tendency to gravitate to what is possible and away from a traditional preoccupation with naming, measuring, and quantifying deficit. When transposed to the teaching and learning of postmodern therapy, this constructive outlook converts into a deliberate and intentional curiosity about students' understandings and abilities, to their "local knowledge," a term originally coined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983). The articles we read were short on descriptions of didactic practice and long on accounts of processes that draw forth students' values and perspectives in "experience near" language. This is participatory education where the boundaries between teacher and learner are blurred.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue is another common theme in the writings gathered here and a key feature of participatory education. Anderson (1997) talks about language as generative and transformative and she understands therapy as a dialogue. Ongoing and multiple dialogues are characteristic of postmodern teaching and training in therapy: dialogue between teacher and students, among trainees, inner dialogues expressed through written reflections or shared in various conversational settings—these all contribute to creating meaningful learning experiences for students and teachers.

MULTIPLICITY

As Riikonen and Smith (1997) put it, "It would be a mistake to think that inspiring worlds can only be built in one way" (cited in Gergen, 2005, p. 74). The call for "best practices" which has become a familiar anthem across a wide range of contemporary disciplines has a convergent tendency—it seems to suggest that in time we will distill the one proper way to accomplish any particular task. Instead,

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our reading uncovered a celebration of divergence. There are many ways to theorize about therapy, many ways to practice therapy, and many ways to teach it.

CRITIQUE

The boundaries for "postmodern family therapy" as we use the term for the purposes of this issue may be indistinct, but the diverse practices described here all emerge from a critique of the status quo. Theories are regarded as "culturally determined stories [which] contain a normalizing value system that is taken for granted and unexamined" (Freeman & Lobovits, 1993, p. 190). Postmodernism poses a hopeful and energizing alternative to these unexamined, culturally entrenched ways of thinking about persons and problems. Teaching informed by postmodernism is more often in the form of a mutual and critical deconstruction of ideas rather than a "master class" demonstration of expertise.

PERSONAL AGENCY

Harlene Anderson sees clients as experts in their own lives (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Anderson, 1997); White talks with clients about "being in the driver's seat of one's life" and draws forth persons' purposes and commitments (White, 2001). This emphasis on personal agency is prominent in literature about postmodern training and supervision, which highlights students' and trainees' voices.

We expect readers will find these various themes woven throughout the offerings here. In the remainder of this introduction, we provide snapshots of the articles included in this special issue.

Tom Strong points out a situation that seems ironic for a group that values conversation and dialogue so much: the relative lack of dialogue between discursive practitioners and discursive researchers. He offers the exciting possibility of bridging the distance between discursive therapists in the consulting room and discursive researchers in academia. Drawing from qualitative research and recent developments in discourse analysis, Strong suggests ways in which therapists can be more mindful of the "microdynamics" of therapeutic dialogue in order to contribute to more productive conversations.

David Nylund and Julie Tilsen depict their role as "participant managers" who deliberately perturb taken-for-granted ideas and practices, encouraging students to adopt a critical stance. Their article includes an assortment of useful ideas for classroom activities and assignments that enhance students' critical thinking and proposals for student evaluation that take into account the hierarchy between student and teacher.

Elena Fernandez, Sylvia London, and Irma Rodríguez Jazcilevich demonstrate their commitment to multiplicity by speaking in separate voices and describing a

variety of collaborative, dialogically oriented teaching practices in university and private settings.

In an article that feels very personal, William Madsen talks about a difficult situation many of us have experienced: working in a context in which postmodern ideas about therapy are not well known or accepted. Madsen frames these uncomfortable interpersonal situations in terms of the confluence of different discourses and, by doing so, makes them seem more manageable.

Peggy Sax reminds us that therapeutic work is always about the expression of our commitments with deep roots in personal histories. Her richly structured online courses provide students with "scaffolds" for self explorations, paralleling the way in which narrative therapists facilitate conversations with the persons who consult them. Her article is replete with moving accounts of the experience in the words of the students themselves.

Sally St. George and Dan Wulff have given a great deal of thought to what constitutes a participatory curriculum nested in a community context. They invite students to evaluate the "community-mindedness" of the various practices they explore. They also place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of research as a vehicle for effecting change, as well as an accountability practice to ensure quality of service.

Mishka Lysack also hones in on the central role of dialogue. He depicts a multilayered learning exercise that draws from his work with reflecting teams, definitional ceremonies, and "as if" teams, as well as from Karl Tomm's interviews with "internalized others." Lysack's conceptual framework is inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of authoritarian discourse and internally persuasive discourse.

David Marsten and Gregory Howard discuss the influence of Foucault's ideas on their work, particularly his "power-knowledge" equation. They strive to be aware of power differentials in language and relationships as they focus on how cultural discourses about teaching and learning are manifested in the classroom. Their learning exercises invite students to talk about their "intentional states" and to examine and rediscover values and positions that are important to them.

Anderson has said that the main question of postmodern therapies has to do with how clients and therapists can create the kinds of conversations and relationships that allow them to access their creativity and generate possibilities (2001). The offerings in this issue promote this generativity in dialogue between teachers/trainers and students/trainees.

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Shawver (2000) talks about "generous listening" to refer to an openness to other people's ideas and an acceptance of the distinctive way in which they use their words, even if we do not agree with their conclusions (Shawver, n.d.). She proposes that generous listening is one of the ways to create what Lyotard called paralogy, "a kind of conversation that evokes new ideas and stimulates social bonding" (Shawver, n.d.) The contributions here also represent that generosity in a couple of ways. They present examples of a "generous pedagogy" wherein the perspectives of all participants is invoked earnestly in a mutual quest for under-

standing. They are generous offerings from many teachers and trainers of post-modern therapies, replete with ideas and exercises ripe for application—gifts for anyone who teaches postmodern therapies, and indeed family therapy in general.

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