

Preface

If you do counseling in schools, this book is for you. If you are a teacher interested in developing more productive conversations with young people in schools, we hope you too will find ideas here that will stimulate your work.

Much has changed since we wrote the first edition of *Narrative Counseling in Schools*. We wrote that book while living and working in New Zealand and working with school counselors and psychologists in New Zealand schools. Now we are both living in the United States and working in North American universities and with public schools in California. We have been learning to understand the role of school counselors in North America. What has not changed is our enthusiasm for narrative counseling approaches. This book arises from our enthusiasm for narrative practice and for the kinds of conversation that can be generated when we think in narrative ways. The narrative pot has been bubbling in New Zealand for a number of years, as it has been in Australia. It has been heated especially by the creative, bold, and compassionate work of David Epston and Michael White. Others have taken up these ideas in North America, South America, Britain and Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and run with them enthusiastically. However, narrative therapy has largely grown within the family therapy tradition. Our concern is that school counselors are not necessarily closely linked to this tradition and that they therefore may be missing out on the news of this fresh approach to counseling. We wanted to address this state of affairs and speak directly to counselors working in schools.

MAKING TIME FOR COUNSELING CONVERSATIONS

There is a lot that is different about what school counselors and psychologists do from country to country, state to state, and school district to school district and between private and public contexts. In some schools, school counselors are so dominated by the responsibilities of day-to-day school administration and scheduling that they barely have an opportunity to provide counseling, a job that they are trained to do in graduate school. In all contexts where counselors work, we believe there is always some potential for the conduct of conversation, even if it does not always resemble the conventional 50-minute therapy hour that has been honored through the history of counseling. Such conversations can always be conducted in a spirit of profound respect and as an expression of a concern for social justice. Narrative practices are attempts to embody such ethical principles in particular ways. We find that, if taken seriously and elaborated creatively, they lead to often surprisingly generative outcomes.

THE NARRATIVE METAPHOR

The enthusiasm we want to share is for the creative potential that comes from thinking in terms of a narrative metaphor. The simple but profound notion that stories, rather than hard-nosed realities, shape our lives is at the base of this work. Much academic excitement has arisen about the possibilities opened up by postmodern or narrative ideas, but there is a need to translate this excitement into ideas for effective and useful practice. Narrative therapy is a bold step in this direction. It is eminently practical and well suited to counseling in schools. In this book, we want to make the practical value of these ideas obvious and accessible.

One of the advantages of the narrative metaphor is that it opens up fresh ways to talk about the intimate, daily struggles of young people and teachers to create meaningful and satisfying lives in the midst of institutional demands and pervasive social forces. We believe it offers us considerable leverage for powerful and effective conversations that produce meaningful changes for people in school communities. It also helps us work with (or against) the way we are all positioned by cultural, gender, and economic discourses.

SUCCEEDING IN SPITE OF TIME CONSTRAINTS

We have noticed many school counselors doing a lot of advising in schools in all kinds of settings. Often under pressure, they understandably resort to giving quick advice rather than seeking out generative conversation. With the incredible demands placed on their time, counselors may be barely able to get even a few minutes with a student through the course of the day. These short time frames barely give counselors opportunities to do client-centered counseling, which involves a lot of listening and following of the student's experiences. Counselors certainly cannot contemplate the lengthy interventions that psychodynamic therapeutic methods require. Instead, counselors can get into habits that involve providing advice and direction rather than counseling per se. It is much quicker to tell a young person what to do than to find out how the student perceives important issues in schooling, life, and work. Unfortunately, while giving advice involves a relatively short amount of time for the adviser, it seldom has much effect on a troubled young person if the adviser has not discovered the young person's goals and aspirations.

This book offers a whole range of effective practices that can be applied rapidly with young people in need of guidance, without resorting to ineffective adult directives and lectures. What's more, young people take to narrative conversations, often more easily than adults do. They warm to the respect they are shown and to the playfulness with which this approach allows them to address serious problems in their lives. Counselors, in our experience, also enjoy working in a narrative way. They find themselves more energized by the people with whom they work.

HOW DOES NARRATIVE COUNSELING DIFFER FROM OTHER APPROACHES?

A narrative approach to counseling is not built on the same assumptions as some other therapies, and we believe these differences make it uniquely suited to the domain of school counseling. We have identified seven major differences.

1. Narrative approaches do not aim for long-term personality reconstruction. Hence there is no need to address current problems

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by delving into the recesses of childhood dramas. In school counseling, such delving is not really possible anyway since the counseling clients are actually in the middle of experiencing their childhood. A narrative approach is a *brief* method of counseling that fits better into the economy of the school than do approaches that rely on in-depth exploration.

2. The narrative approach is not built on the counselor's expert knowledge, even when that knowledge is bolstered by statistically valid evidence. Narrative counselors believe that it is far more prudent and more effective to rely on the client's knowledge of what can make a difference.

3. Narrative counseling methods do not focus primarily on the production of intense emotion or on a cathartic release of feeling in order to bring about change. This does not mean that narrative counselors are mainly cognitive in their focus or that they ignore clients' feelings. On the contrary, they are very concerned to acknowledge, care about, and respect the feelings that problems produce. But the mechanisms of change in narrative counseling take place more through shifts in story than through shifts in feeling. We regard feelings or emotions (like thoughts and cognitions) as produced within a larger story and as liable to shift as the story shifts. A person's feelings represent the position in the story that constitutes experience at the moment. If someone is caught in the middle of a problematic story, we would not ask the person to own the feelings that accompany this story either, as some therapies do. The reason is that we are more interested in inviting people to "*disidentify*" with a problem story and to own their competence and resourcefulness or their capacity to find a solution than to take ownership of a problem.

4. A narrative approach to counseling does not privilege the "here and now" over the past and the future, as some therapies do. The reason is that it is in the nature of stories to move through time. All present moments have a past and a future. We are interested in building links between these moments, particularly in the development of an alternative story that can serve as the basis of going forward. To focus only on the present would mean losing some of the resources that can be brought to bear in counseling.

5. A narrative approach to counseling does not require the client to learn to speak in a theoretical jargon. Nor should a narrative

counselor be teaching clients to speak in a particular way. Instead, a narrative approach requires the counselor to listen to the metaphors of the client (in this book, the student) and to learn to speak in these terms. Hence it is not necessary for clients to be articulate or adult in order to benefit from narrative counseling. Even young children (one might even say *especially* young children) are very adept at talking in metaphors. Skillful narrative counselors learn to speak in terms that join with the child's language. Hence it can be said that a narrative approach is well suited to working with the language worlds that children in schools are familiar with.

6. A narrative approach to counseling does not focus on individuals in a way that separates them from their family, peer group, or social context. Instead, narrative counseling methods seek to make use of the significant others in a person's life as witnesses who can notice the story the person is constructing and help it to grow. It is an approach to counseling that is uniquely suited to the *building of communities* and *networks of relationships* more than the strengthening of individuals' singular selves. Since schools are small communities where diverse groups of people need to live and work together, we believe an approach to counseling that consciously aims to do this work is strongly suited to the school context.

7. Finally, a narrative perspective does not assume a universal psychology built on a core human nature that is coated around the outside with a cultural worldview. We find this assumption very common in some theories of counseling. A narrative perspective, through its concentration on discourse influences, is therefore well positioned to respond to the increasing complexities of cultural diversity and to notice how cultural stories have powerful shaping effects in young people's lives. Hence narrative counseling methods prime counselors to work effectively with diversity and with the cultural forces at work in children's lives.

In a world where school counselors face increasing caseloads and complex demands, we therefore believe that a narrative perspective equips counselors to work both efficiently and effectively in ways that address the demands on young people's lives and the pressures on counselors' workload. Counselors who adopt the curiosity and willingness to learn from their clients that narrative counseling requires are often even energized and enlivened themselves by the

thrilling stories of courage that they encounter daily, rather than being drained by the burden of having to be the expert.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

It seems appropriate to tell stories as we talk about a narrative approach to counseling. Therefore, we have liberally sprinkled stories of narrative counseling in action through this book to convey its flavor in a school context. Chapter 1 is, in fact, a story of a counselor's work with one student, interspersed with comments that describe what the counselor is doing. We have also sought to provide clear guidelines for the practitioner of narrative counseling and even sample lists of questions to suggest typical lines of inquiry in a narrative interview. Chapter 2 contains a step-by-step outline of how to do narrative counseling. In Chapter 3, we pick up on some specific aspects of school discourse and outline some ways of achieving redescriptions of the typical labels that get ascribed to young people in school. In Chapter 4, we concentrate on the particular counseling needs of young people who are "in trouble" at school. Chapter 5 ends the book with an expansion beyond the individual. Here, we consider ways of working with significant others, groups, "communities of concern," whole classes, and even with a whole school community.

NEW TO THE SECOND EDITION

In this second edition we have sought to increase the usefulness of the book by updating the content throughout and responding to particular requests and concerns. In the first edition, most of the examples of school counseling practice came from New Zealand. In this revision, we have included many more examples from the work of American school counselors. We have also sought to respond to current developments in the school counseling field in the United States, where the American School Counselor Association's National Model is having a profound influence on the practice of counseling in schools. We have included more material for the use of group counseling and guidance lessons in this regard. Chapter 5 in particular addresses increasing accountability for school counselors and offers a range of resources for school counselors to use in building a counseling program.

We have also responded to developments in narrative counseling in general. The narrative counseling literature has continued to grow rapidly, with significant contributions to the literature on narrative school counseling in particular. Tina Besley (2002), in her book *Counseling Youth: Foucault, Power, and the Ethics of Subjectivity*, made some careful critiques of our book, and we have therefore made adjustments to this edition in response. Further additional material has been included based on new work by David Nylund on children diagnosed with ADHD, as well as the work of Marie-Nathalie Beaudoin and Maureen Taylor. Applications of narrative approaches to disciplinary issues have evolved through the work that we and others (especially Wendy Drewery) have done under the name of restorative practices. And many specific examples of further practice elaborations have been added since the first edition. We are therefore confident that this second edition substantially enlarges what we wrote in 1999.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is grounded in our own work with young people in schools, but it was also originally grounded in the stories we shared with our students at the University of Waikato, where we used to work as counselor educators. To these stories have since been added accounts of the work done by our students at California State University San Bernardino and San Diego State University. Many students in each of these universities have been highly creative in the work they have done as school counselors, and their stories have both instructed us and enlivened this book. We would like to acknowledge Nancy Paulsen for the work that she has allowed us to include in Chapter 5. We would also like to acknowledge Aileen Cheshire, Dorothea Lewis, Donald McMenamin, Pamela Gray-Yeates, Elizabeth Jordan, Coral Stuart, Nigel Pizzini, and Ian Frayling in particular for some of the specific examples we have used, as well as the young people with whom they have worked, whose stories are represented in these pages. Jeffrey Kottler was highly influential in the original conception of this project, and we acknowledge his encouragement and support. Donald McMenamin, Aileen Cheshire, Rolla Lewis, Jeffrey Kottler, and Heather-Ann Monk have also helped us by reading and commenting on earlier

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*John Winslade and Gerald Monk
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