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Decentring Research: Reflecting On Reflecting Teams

A dissertation submitted to meet the requirements of the degree of

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Abstract

This dissertation is an interview based qualitative research study into reflecting team practice. The central question posed is "What can therapists learn from reflecting on their own and their clients' experience of therapy?" Interviews with three clients and two therapists were recorded and transcribed for research purposes. Interview questions were derived from key themes identified in the literature: becoming a client; the experience of self; the experience of the therapeutic relationship; the experience of specific therapeutic practices; and the experience of outcomes. Drawing on White and Epston (1990) the author develops a decentred approach to research practice that is congruent with the values and philosophy of reflecting teams and narrative therapy.

A key finding to emerge from this study is the importance of paying attention to the client's experience of the therapists; the therapists' experience of self; and the therapists' experience of their relationship to their colleagues on the reflecting team. According to both therapists and clients interviewed for this study it is important for the therapists to be there as 'persons' not just as 'professionals'. For example, one of the therapists interviewed spoke of reflecting from "the heart" rather than doing "technique-driven" reflections. Also, the clients spoke about the importance of the "down-to-earth" way in which the therapists communicated. This helps both to establish a positive relationship and to decentre the 'professional knowledge' of the therapist. The degree of comfort and trust experienced by members of the reflecting team with each other also seemed to enhance the experience of therapy for *all* participants. The findings support the use of reflecting teams in agencies as a form of brief therapy *and* as a means of ongoing professional development. They also support the findings of previous research

that we need to pay more attention to how the therapeutic relationship operates in a reflecting team context (Gaddis, 1998; 2002).

Furthermore, these findings suggested that the process of participating in these research interviews was helpful to both therapists and their clients. To therapists, in the sense that the process helped them to put into words their practice wisdom, by reflecting on their own practice and the experience of their clients; to clients, in the sense that it complemented the therapeutic process they were involved in and gave them the opportunity to give something back to others.

The findings are examples of local knowledge only, and make no validity claims to universal truth status. Claims made cannot therefore be generalised to other practice contexts. However, the author draws a number of implications for clinical and research practice from the findings and these are discussed in detail in chapter five. The author acknowledges that these implications are based on his own subjective reading of the findings and practitioners are invited to reach their own conclusions as to the relevance of these findings for their own practice.

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