

# School Counselling as Community Work

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Social Practice Pathway

Recent Research & Innovations in Practice

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# We are Community Change agents

- \* My biggest client is the culture of the school – the power dynamics and community of care between staff, staff and students, between students and between the school/staff and its whanau / local community.
- \* We are tasked to challenge and cultivate a climate of care, support, acceptance, positive regard and safety for all. School counsellors can be at the forefront of this.



# Brochure Project Example

- \* Shares the wisdom, experience and insight of young people with a wider audience
- \* Invites young people to see themselves as holders of unique and important information
- \* Repositions a young person from “troubled” to “consultant”
- \* Creates “communities of care” across the school campus

# Background

- \* Brings together two kinds of narrative approaches: counselling and community work.
- \* Narrative counselling: non-pathologising approach to problems. Examines their social construction; privileges clients' voices and preferences (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990).
- \* 'Externalising': what does shame get you to do that goes against your better judgement? How does it do that?

# Background

- \* Goal is not separating people from problems, but opening up new possibilities for people's positioning and agency/empowerment in relation to them (Winslade, 2005).
- \* Key element is the 'circulation' of preferred versions of identity amongst friends and family. Preferred identities seen to be social phenomena as well. The circulation of preferences is crucial to support and sustain change.

# Background

- \* **Community work:** enacted at a group level in the first instance (macro level). E.g., work alongside aboriginal groups to support culture change around desired responses to colonial legacies (Denborough, 2008; Wingard, Johnson & Drahm-Butler, 2015).
- \* **Counselling** often seen as more individual or relational (micro level)
- \* Brochure project synthesises narrative counselling and community work. It creates a local community of care, via documenting key elements of counselling conversations about problems that a number of students have experienced.

# Background

- \* Brochures allow advice and inspiring strategies to be circulated amongst the student body, consolidating and strengthening preferences and also potentially helping other students who have not even seen the school counsellor.
- \* Student contributors are anonymous to one another to maintain the confidentiality of counselling conversations. The counsellor facilitates the process.



# Brochure Development

- \* Close listening to the stories and experiences being shared in counselling conversations
- \* Honouring these stories and expressions by writing down the words and metaphors used to describe experiences of the problem, and the person's journey to freedom from the problem
- \* Asking permission to include these in the brochures
- \* Co-creating the brochures as they evolve



# Content Creation

## Key questions:

1. What did this problem get you to think about yourself, about others, about other things?
2. What was it like for you when this problem was around?
3. What did this problem want you to believe about yourself, your future, your family/teachers/friends, the world, and about the problem itself?

# Content Creation

4. What did you want for yourself or your life (instead of what the problem wanted)?
5. What did you find helpful, or what **could** have helped you with this problem?
6. What advice do you have to offer others still dealing with this problem in their lives?
7. What would you advise friends to do? What did you want them to do to support you?



# Brochure Sections

1. What the problem is like
2. What I want
3. What we found helps
4. Advice (to someone experiencing this problem)
5. Suggested Strategies
6. Where to go for help
7. How to make an appointment with the school counsellor



# Mocking

## Ways we have experienced this problem

- \* Mocking, teasing, mean comments, put-downs
- \* Being left out
- \* Making fun of me or making “jokes” about me
- \* Imitating my voice or actions
- \* Judgemental looks
- \* Laughing behind my back



# Mocking

## What Mocking or Teasing can do to us...

- \* I started to think everyone was judging me. I felt embarrassed, nervous, and self conscious.
- \* I lost confidence, got embarrassed and would hide things I loved doing for fear that these would be mocked too.
- \* I stopped being myself because of other people's judgments. I was afraid I would stand out.
- \* I felt really alone, sad, left out, and powerless to make it stop.
- \* It stopped me from talking to others in class.
- \* I struggled to focus—I worried about what people might do or say.



# Mocking

## What I want

- \* I want people to treat me normally, to see me for who I am and not judge me.
- \* I want to be treated with respect and be free from Mocking and feel safe.
- \* When I come to school I want to feel happy and get along with others in my class. I want to be accepted, included, and not to feel different from everyone else.

# Mocking

## What we found helps

- \* Talking to my friends about the problem so I don't feel alone or that it's 'just me' (it's not my fault).
- \* Asking my friends to help or share their experience of similar problems and what helped them.
- \* Remembering that people who use mocking aren't happy. They may be jealous, angry, or needing to make themselves feel better.
- \* See mocking as trying to take away my happiness, confidence, self acceptance or whatever and add it to theirs.

# Mocking

## Advice

- \* Don't put up with it! It probably won't just stop or go away all by itself.
- \* First, try talking calmly to the person 'in person' without being confrontational, demanding or agro.
- \* Give a reason why what they are saying or doing is hurtful to you.
- \* Have a friend come along as referee or helper.

# A Strategy Suggestion

## Creating a Support Team (Community of Care)

- \* Chose 5 or 6+ people you think will want to support you.
- \* For each one, come up with a specific thing they could do that you would find supportive
- \* Invite each person to be part of your support team.
- \* Instruct them in what you want them to do and how they will know it's time to do it (e.g. What will you ask or do, or what do they need to be on the lookout for as a sign that their support acts are needed).
- \* Periodically give them some feedback about how they're going as a member of your Support Team—and don't forget to thank them!

# Brochure Topics

- \* Anger and Violence
- \* Friendship Fallout
- \* Overcoming Personal Hurdles
- \* Feeling Down
- \* Cutting and other self-harm
- \* Cyber Bullying
- \* Rumours and Gossip
- \* Mocking
- \* Eating issues
- \* Worries, Anxiety and Panic
- \* When Hope is Gone (Suicidal Ideation)
- \* Unwanted or “bad” sexual experiences

# Questions and Discussion

Thank you for participating with me in our sharing of this narrative community project.

# References

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