
Graduate Certificate in Narrative Therapy in Psychology

Foundations of Narrative Practice

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Narrative therapy is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on the stories we tell about ourselves and how these stories shape our identities, relationships, and experiences. This approach is based on the idea that our lives are made up of multiple narratives that can be re-written or re-authored to create new meanings, possibilities, and outcomes.

In the Graduate Certificate in Narrative Therapy in Psychology, students will explore the foundations of narrative practice, including key terms and vocabulary that are essential for understanding and applying this therapeutic approach effectively.

Narrative

A narrative is a story or account of events, experiences, or interactions that give meaning to our lives. In narrative therapy, individuals are encouraged to explore and reflect on the stories they tell themselves about who they are, where they come from, and what they are capable of.

For example, a client may have a dominant narrative of being a failure due to past experiences of setbacks and disappointments. Through narrative therapy, the client can explore alternative narratives that highlight their strengths, resilience, and successes to create a more empowering and hopeful story about themselves.

Externalization

Externalization is a key concept in narrative therapy that involves separating a person from the problem they are experiencing. By externalizing the problem, individuals can gain a new perspective on their challenges and begin to see themselves as separate from the issue at hand.

For instance, a client struggling with anxiety may externalize the anxiety by giving it a name or persona, such as "The Worry Monster." This allows the client to view the anxiety as something external that can be addressed and managed, rather than an inherent part of who they are.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a process in narrative therapy that involves breaking down the dominant or problematic narratives that individuals hold about themselves. By deconstructing these narratives, clients can identify the underlying beliefs, assumptions, and values that contribute to their distress or difficulties.

For example, a client who believes they are unworthy of love and respect may deconstruct this narrative by examining the experiences and messages that have shaped this belief. Through this process, the client can challenge and reframe their negative self-perceptions to create new, more positive narratives about themselves.

Re-authoring

Re-authoring is the process of rewriting or re-narrating one's life story to create more empowering, hopeful, and resilient narratives. In narrative therapy, clients are encouraged to actively participate in re-authoring their stories by highlighting their strengths, values, and preferred identities.

For instance, a client who has experienced trauma may re-author their story by emphasizing their resilience, courage, and capacity for healing. By co-creating new narratives with the therapist, clients can reclaim agency over their lives and imagine alternative paths forward.

Unique Outcomes

Unique outcomes are exceptions to the dominant or problem-saturated narratives that individuals hold about themselves. These exceptions are moments, experiences, or interactions that challenge the existing story and offer glimpses of alternative possibilities and identities.

For example, a client who sees themselves as a chronic procrastinator may identify unique outcomes where they were able to complete tasks on time or take proactive steps towards their goals. By amplifying these exceptions, clients can disrupt the dominant narrative and explore new ways of being and relating to themselves and others.

Thick Description

Thick description is a term borrowed from anthropology that refers to the detailed and nuanced exploration of individuals' experiences, emotions, and contexts. In narrative therapy, therapists aim to elicit thick descriptions from clients to understand the complexities and subtleties of their stories.

For instance, a therapist may ask a client to provide a thick description of a significant event in their life, including sensory details, emotions, thoughts, and interactions with others. By delving deeply into these narratives, therapists can uncover hidden meanings, values, and beliefs that shape clients' identities and experiences.

Re-membering

Re-membering is a process in narrative therapy that involves bringing together fragmented or disconnected parts of an individual's story to create a coherent and integrated narrative. This process helps clients make sense of their experiences, relationships, and identities by weaving together different threads of their lives.

For example, a client who has experienced trauma may have fragmented memories and emotions that feel disjointed and overwhelming. Through re-membering, the client can integrate these parts into a cohesive narrative that acknowledges their pain, resilience, and capacity for healing.

Counter-storytelling

Counter-storytelling is a practice in narrative therapy that involves challenging dominant or oppressive narratives through the telling of alternative, subversive, or marginalized stories. By amplifying counter-

stories, individuals can resist and transform harmful discourses that perpetuate stigma, injustice, and inequality.

For instance, a therapist working with a client from a marginalized community may help them articulate their counter-story of resistance, survival, and resilience in the face of discrimination and prejudice. By elevating these narratives, clients can reclaim agency, dignity, and power in shaping their own identities and futures.

Re-authoring Conversations

Re-authoring conversations are collaborative dialogues between therapists and clients that focus on co-creating new, preferred narratives about one's life, relationships, and experiences. These conversations are guided by curiosity, respect, and a commitment to exploring alternative meanings and possibilities.

For example, a re-authoring conversation may involve a therapist asking a client to reflect on a time when they felt competent, valued, or connected to others. By exploring these exceptions and strengths, clients can begin to construct new stories that emphasize their agency, resilience, and potential for growth.

Therapeutic Letter Writing

Therapeutic letter writing is a technique in narrative therapy that involves the creation of letters to oneself or others to explore, reflect, and re-author one's stories. These letters provide a safe space for clients to express their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations in a creative and structured way.

For instance, a client struggling with self-doubt may write a letter to their younger self, offering words of encouragement, validation, and wisdom. Through this process, clients can externalize their inner voices, gain perspective on their experiences, and imagine new possibilities for healing and transformation.

Scaffolded Conversations

Scaffolded conversations are structured, purposeful, and collaborative dialogues between therapists and clients that guide the exploration, deconstruction, and re-authoring of narratives. These conversations provide a supportive framework for clients to navigate difficult emotions, challenges, and insights in their therapeutic journey.

For example, a therapist may scaffold a conversation with a client by asking open-ended questions, offering reflections, and exploring alternative perspectives on their experiences. By providing a safe and structured space for reflection and growth, therapists can help clients make sense of their stories and envision new pathways forward.

Preferred Identity

Preferred identity is a concept in narrative therapy that involves the exploration and cultivation of desired, empowering, and authentic self-concepts. By focusing on preferred identities, individuals can amplify their strengths, values, and aspirations to create more fulfilling, purposeful, and meaningful lives.

For example, a client may identify their preferred identity as a compassionate, resilient, and creative individual who is capable of overcoming challenges and making a positive impact on others. By embodying and enacting this preferred identity, clients can align their actions, beliefs, and relationships with their deepest values and aspirations.

Re-storying Relationships

Re-storying relationships is a practice in narrative therapy that involves examining, reframing, and transforming the narratives that shape one's connections with others. By re-storying relationships, individuals can cultivate healthier, more authentic, and more satisfying ways of relating to partners, family members, friends, and colleagues.

For example, a couple in therapy may re-story their relationship by exploring the dominant narratives that fuel conflicts, misunderstandings, and disconnections between them. Through this process, the couple can co-create new stories that emphasize empathy, respect, and collaboration to build stronger, more resilient bonds.

Therapeutic Documents

Therapeutic documents are written or recorded narratives that capture and preserve the insights, reflections, and transformations that emerge in the therapeutic process. These documents serve as tangible reminders of clients' progress, growth, and resilience, and can be revisited and revised to support ongoing healing and change.

For example, a therapist may create a therapeutic document with a client that summarizes their key learnings, goals, and commitments from therapy sessions. This document can serve as a roadmap for the client's continued journey of self-discovery, empowerment, and transformation beyond the therapeutic setting.

Re-authoring Communities

Re-authoring communities are spaces, practices, and movements that promote collective storytelling, reflection, and action to challenge dominant discourses, systems, and structures of oppression. By re-authoring communities, individuals can create new narratives of solidarity, justice, and liberation that empower and uplift marginalized voices and experiences.

For example, a community organization may host storytelling workshops, public forums, or advocacy campaigns to amplify the voices of marginalized groups, challenge stereotypes, and advocate for social change. Through these collective efforts, communities can co-create new stories that honor diversity, equity, and inclusion as foundational values.

Future-oriented Narratives

Future-oriented narratives are stories that imagine, envision, and shape desired outcomes, possibilities, and realities for individuals, relationships, and communities. By focusing on future-oriented narratives, individuals can set goals, cultivate hope, and mobilize resources to create meaningful, purposeful, and

fulfilling lives.

For example, a client may co-author a future-oriented narrative with their therapist that envisions a life filled with joy, connection, and growth. By exploring this preferred future, clients can identify the steps, resources, and support needed to manifest their aspirations and overcome barriers to change and transformation.

Collaborative Inquiry

Collaborative inquiry is a process in narrative therapy that involves co-creating knowledge, insights, and meanings through shared dialogue, reflection, and exploration. In collaborative inquiry, therapists and clients engage in a joint exploration of narratives, experiences, and possibilities to co-author new stories of healing, growth, and transformation.

For example, a therapist may engage in collaborative inquiry with a client by inviting them to reflect on their values, strengths, and aspirations for the future. Through this shared exploration, clients can deepen their self-understanding, expand their perspectives, and co-create new narratives that align with their deepest desires and aspirations.

Alternative Story Development

Alternative story development is a practice in narrative therapy that involves exploring, experimenting, and co-creating new narratives that challenge, disrupt, or transform dominant or problem-saturated stories. By engaging in alternative story development, individuals can expand their repertoire of identities, meanings, and possibilities to create more adaptive, empowering, and resilient narratives.

For example, a client struggling with self-criticism may develop alternative stories that highlight their self-compassion, courage, and capacity for growth. By experimenting with these new narratives, clients can cultivate a more balanced, compassionate, and affirming relationship with themselves that nurtures their well-being, confidence, and authenticity.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is a foundational skill in narrative therapy that involves ongoing self-awareness, self-exploration, and self-reflection to deepen one's understanding of one's values, beliefs, biases, and assumptions. By engaging in reflective practice, therapists can enhance their capacity for empathy, curiosity, and humility in working with clients and co-creating new narratives of healing and transformation.

For example, a therapist may engage in reflective practice by journaling about their experiences, insights, and challenges in therapy sessions. By reflecting on their interactions, responses, and emotions, therapists can uncover blind spots, biases, and growth edges that inform their therapeutic practice and enhance their effectiveness in supporting clients' journeys of self-discovery, empowerment, and change.

Cultural Humility

Cultural humility is a stance, attitude, and practice of openness, curiosity, and respect towards diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. In narrative therapy, cultural humility involves

acknowledging and valuing the unique stories, values, and strengths that individuals bring to the therapeutic relationship, and co-creating narratives that honor and affirm their identities, histories, and aspirations.

For example, a therapist working with a client from a different cultural background may practice cultural humility by listening attentively, asking open-ended questions, and refraining from making assumptions or judgments based on their own cultural norms or biases. By adopting a stance of cultural humility, therapists can create inclusive, respectful, and empowering spaces for clients to share their stories, perspectives, and experiences authentically and safely.

Ethical Practice

Ethical practice in narrative therapy involves upholding values of respect, autonomy, confidentiality, and social justice in working with clients and communities. Ethical practice requires therapists to navigate complex ethical dilemmas, power dynamics, and cultural differences with integrity, transparency, and accountability to ensure the well-being, safety, and empowerment of clients in the therapeutic process.

For example, a therapist may practice ethical conduct by obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and respecting clients' autonomy and self-determination in making decisions about their therapeutic journey. By adhering to ethical guidelines and principles, therapists can create trusting, respectful, and empowering relationships with clients that honor their dignity, agency, and well-being in co-creating narratives of healing, growth, and transformation.

In conclusion, the Foundations of Narrative Practice in the Graduate Certificate in Narrative Therapy in Psychology provide students with essential concepts, skills, and vocabulary for understanding, applying, and integrating narrative therapy principles and techniques into their professional practice. By exploring key terms such as narrative, externalization, deconstruction, re-authoring, unique outcomes, thick description, re-remembering, counter-storytelling, re-authoring conversations, therapeutic letter writing, scaffolded conversations, preferred identity, re-storying relationships, therapeutic documents, re-authoring communities, future-oriented narratives, collaborative inquiry, alternative story development, reflective practice, cultural humility, and ethical practice, students can deepen their knowledge, skills, and competencies in working with individuals, families, groups, and communities to co-create new narratives of healing, growth, and transformation that honor diversity, agency, and resilience. By embracing the core values of narrative therapy, including curiosity, respect, collaboration, and hope, students can cultivate therapeutic relationships that empower, validate, and transform clients' stories, identities, and experiences in ways that promote healing, resilience, and well-being in diverse contexts and settings.