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Narrative Counseling for Professional School Counselors

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NARRATIVE COUNSELING FOR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS

This article introduces narrative counseling concepts and techniques for professional school counselors. The authors provide a case study of narrative school counseling with an elementary student struggling with selective mutism. Examples also demonstrate how a narrative approach could be used at elementary, middle, and high school levels within various school counseling contexts, including small group counseling, classroom guidance, and consultation and advocacy. This article highlights the power and flexibility of a narrative approach to support students with a variety of needs as part of a comprehensive school counseling program.

magine a world where individuals are empowered to challenge the perceptions and events in their lives that limit potential. Imagine a world where students are not the problem and have the abilities, talents, and life experiences to create new possibilities for individual and systemic change. This is the world of narrative school counselors. Narrative counseling is based on the belief that "we live our lives according to the stories we tell about ourselves and the stories others tell about us" (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 2). However, narrative counseling is not about students simply telling their stories; instead, it is about reworking stories so that new realities can take shape (Winslade & Monk, 2007).

Narrative counseling is a multiculturally sensitive approach rooted in social constructionism, a philosophical perspective that sees problems as constructed through people's languaging of social, cultural, and political influences (Monk, 1997; Semmler & Williams, 2000). Narrative counselors encourage clients to "use their own words to tell their own stories which carry their own meaning" (Semmler & Williams, 2000, p. 51). Narrative counselors are aware of their own cultural positioning and take a curious stance in relation to clients (White, 2007; Winslade & Monk, 2007), who are seen as the experts of their own lives (Lambie & Milsom, 2010). Narrative counseling is strengths-based (Gehart, 2013) and brief (Winslade & Monk, 2007), making it a good fit for busy school counselors who are called to implement

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comprehensive school counseling programs and address the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Standards for Students (ASCA, 2004; 2012a). An effective theoretical counseling framework such as narrative provides professional school counselors with a practical way to focus on students' holistic development ranging from mental health needs to academic achievement (Lambie & Milsom, 2010; Olson, Korcuska, & Paez, 2007). It is also a useful approach for consulting and collaborating with other school and community stakeholders (Winslade & Monk, 2007).

The purpose of this article is to introduce readers to a narrative school counseling perspective. To that end, we write out of a narrative stance in a conversational style that aims to include the reader. Using an individual counseling case study, a small group format, a classroom guidance unit, and an example of consultation and advocacy, we describe key narrative concepts and techniques.

SOME NARRATIVE BASICS

Narrative pioneers White and Epston (1990) used the term narrative to describe the stories that shape our lives, that give us our sense of identity. Our narratives develop over time as we interact with family, community members and institutions, and the broader culture in which we live (Besley, 2001; Epston, 1998; White, 1992 & 2000). We internalize the stories that are told and retold at home, at school, and in the world around us. For example, if "you are a failure" is what you hear repeatedly, you may start to believe this problem-saturated narrative and identify as a total failure (Cook-Cottone, 2004). You see yourself as the problem.

Problem-saturated narratives can crowd out other equally valid stories about who we are and they can keep us from imagining that alternative, preferred narratives are even possible

(Besley, 2001). Countering this, narrative counselors separate the person from the problem (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997). This is done so that we can gain perspective on the problem, walk around it, so to speak, and creatively engage in authoring a preferred narrative. Therefore the mantra: "The problem is the problem. The person is not the problem" (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 2).

This foundational narrative concept leads us into a case study in which the first author worked with a Native American second grade student strug-

> ## NARRATIVE COUNSELING IS BASED ON THE BELIEF THAT "WE LIVE OUR LIVES ACCORDING TO THE STORIES WE TELL ABOUT OURSELVES AND THE STORIES OTHERS TELL ABOUT US."

gling with selective mutism at a Title I school. Throughout the case study, we explain narrative tools. We will refer to the student as Mary and the first author will speak in the first person.

A CASE FOR NARRATIVE

Mary had not spoken in her classroom for 1½ years. Her classroom teacher referred her to me because this problem negatively impacted Mary's academic, career, and personal/social development (ASCA, 2004). From a narrative perspective, Mary struggled with a problem-saturated narrative built on her silence in the classroom.

Prior to meeting Mary in an individual counseling setting, I observed in Mary's classroom, and consulted and collaborated with other school professionals who worked with her. During the classroom observation, Mary did not talk with her small group or when her teacher called on her; however, Mary did participate nonverbally in classroom activities such as complet-

ing worksheets, doing art projects, or using arithmetic manipulatives in front of class. When consulting with the school's speech language pathologist, she explained Mary's language development goals and weekly speech therapy progress. A school counselor who worked with Mary in group counseling the prior year shared that although Mary had not talked in her classroom, she had spoken in the school counseling office—something Mary continued to do with me. Throughout this process, I collaborated with Mary's teacher.

Although narrative counseling is not a linear approach, several key elements occur early in the counseling process. For example, narrative school counselors will listen to students' problem-saturated narratives (Wolter, DiLollo, & Apel, 2006). Even though students initially view their lives through the problem-saturated narrative, narrative counselors often view this narrative as a *thin description* of the students' lives because certain events and details of the students' lives are often left out (Wolter et al., 2006). In this case illustration, Mary's school experience was dominated by a narrative of silence. This thin description did not fully describe Mary's desire or ability to talk.

During the initial two sessions, Mary and I worked on building trust. Narrative counselors promote trust in the counseling relationship by asking permission to ask questions and take notes, recognizing the students' abilities and experiences, having genuine curiosity about the students' experiences, and viewing students as experts on their own lives (Winslade & Monk, 2007). Mary and I used a variety of developmentally appropriate strate-

gies to build our working relationship. Mary drew a picture of and talked about her family (Esquivel, Oades-Sese, & Jarvis, 2010). She explained that she lived with her mother and father, that she was close to her extended family, and that she had a younger brother who lived with her paternal grandfather. Mary also talked about participating in powwows and taught me some of her favorite words from her tribe's language. When asked what she liked to do at school, Mary shared she liked to play with her friends on the playground. Her drawings and our conversations helped us to uncover parts of her story that contradicted the thin description she was known by at school (Esquivel et al., 2010).

Throughout the counseling process, narrative school counselors use *externalizing language* when referring to students' problems. One way to do this is to name the problem. For example, instead of saying, "What are some ways you have gotten into trouble?" a narrative school counselor would say, "What does Trouble get you to do?" This is both a rhetorical device to help people view problems as separate from their identities and also a reflection of "the narrative belief that problems actually have their origins in the discourses that surround us and get mapped onto our bodies and into our lives. So externalizing problems puts them back where they belong" (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 44; Wolter et al., 2006).

vits, 1997). I did this during the third session with Mary, giving her a lump of play dough and asking her to make something out of the play dough that could represent her voice. After Mary had some fun creating a little purple figure, I asked Mary what we should name her play dough figure. With a lot of thought, Mary decided that the figure should be named "Talk." I asked Mary if we could ask Talk some questions about why Talk was not getting along with Mary in the classroom. After Mary agreed, I looked directly at the play dough figure and said, "Hi, Talk. My name is Ms. Nafziger and I wanted to have you come in here today because I hear that you're not cooperating with Mary all of the time." Mary joined this process by laughing at my silliness, picking up Talk, putting Talk up to her ear, listening to Talk's answers to questions, and then sharing Talk's answers with me. Externalizing the problem both physically and by naming it encouraged Mary to separate herself from the problem.

Once a student's problem-saturated narrative is named, school counselors take on a curious, investigative reporter-like stance (White, 2007), asking questions in order to *map the influence* of the problem on the student's life and relationships (Costa, Nelson, Rudes, & Guterman, 2007; Nylund, 2000). Mapping the influence of the problem helps school counselors understand how long a problem has been present in a student's life, the ex-

lems (Mascher, 2002). Examples of mapping the influence questions are: "How has this problem controlled relationships in your life?" "In what other ways has this problem impacted your life?" "Can you tell me a story of a time when the problem had less influence over you?" (Morgan, 2000).

I moved towards mapping the influence of Mary's problem by consulting with Mary's teacher and her mother. From them I learned that Talk had kept Mary from speaking in class for over a year. I also learned that Talk's influence was not as powerful on the school bus, on the playground, or in the counseling office. Mindful of cultural differences, I explored her mother's perspective of the problem. I learned that Mary was talkative at home and that her mother was very concerned about her silence in the classroom. Armed with this information, I asked Talk some direct questions when meeting with Mary. Looking at Talk I said: "I guess sometimes in class, Talk, you are really low and then people can't hear what Mary is trying to say and that's hard for Mary sometimes. So, I'm wondering where do you go?" Mary responded, "He says... he's…he's too nervous." I asked, "Oh, you're too nervous. Hmmm. Are you nervous right now or do you get nervous in class sometimes?" Mary picked up Talk, listened, and said, "He says in class." Externalizing Mary's problem and mapping its influence with the play dough figure Talk affirmed Mary's ability to see the problem as separate from her identity. It also gave her the space she needed to find words to describe the problem and then strategize how to work with Talk in the classroom.

One way to move forward into strategizing about the future is to explore *sparkling moments* or *unique outcomes* (Morgan, 2000; Winslade & Monk, 2007). These are times in the past when the problem could have happened, but did not; parts of an individual's life that are outside of or contrary to the problem. Unique outcomes may develop in the form of actions, contemplations, abilities, or positive relationships that keep the problem at bay (Ayland & West, 2006;

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Along with externalizing language, school counselors sometimes use physical objects to help students separate themselves from the problem (Eppler, Olsen, & Hidano, 2009; Esquivel et al., 2010; Freeman, Epston, & Lobo-

tent of the impact of the problem, and the intensity of the problem's effect over time (Winslade & Monk, 2007). Mapping the influence questions also encourage students to describe the influence they have over their prob-

Costa et al., 2007; Winslade & Monk, 2007). Narrative counselors always listen for and explore sparkling moments with students. For example, for students struggling with mental health issues such as anxiety or depression a narrative school counselor could ask "Have there been times when you have thought—even for a moment—that you might step out of worry's prison? What did this landscape free of worry look like" (Madigan, 2011, p. 89)? Or "When the depression wants to keep you in bed, how do you eventually get to school" (Winslade and Monk, 2007, p. 52)?

In Mary's case, her ability to talk at home and on the playground are examples of unique outcomes where Talk could have muted her voice, but did not. These unique outcomes allowed Mary to challenge the problem-saturated narrative of her silence in the classroom and to gradually develop a preferred story that focused on her strengths and her control over Talk. This development of the preferred story is referred to as the process of *re-authoring*, which contributes to the authentication of preferred identities, hope, and empowerment (Costa et al., 2007; White, 2000). This is a critical point in the counseling process. Students reach a "Y" in the road and can choose to continue down the path of the problem story, or choose to *thicken the plot* of the preferred story—a process of strengthening the connections between the positive stories in their lives (Wolter et al., 2006). School counselors can bring the contrast of the paths into focus, which can help students see that they have a choice (Winslade & Monk, 2007).

One way of thickening the plot with students is to probe with them how it is they undermine the influence of the problem (Monk & Paulsen, n.d.). For example, a school counselor might ask a student struggling with Failure about when Failure is the weakest. The counselor could probe further for what the student does that threatens Failure's dominance. What options are available that might topple Failure's influence? These questions often elicit

ONE WAY TO MOVE FORWARD INTO STRATEGIZING ABOUT THE FUTURE IS TO EXPLORE SPARKLING MOMENTS OR UNIQUE OUTCOMES . . . WHEN THE PROBLEM COULD HAVE HAPPENED, BUT DID NOT; PARTS OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S LIFE THAT ARE OUTSIDE OF OR CONTRARY TO THE PROBLEM.

stories about times when an assignment was completed or when questions were answered in class—actions taken by the student that tell a story contrary to Failure. Helping students forge links between what seem to be separate or unrelated sparkling moments can help them move further down their chosen path and can help them thicken the plot of their preferred story.

During our third counseling session, Mary and I explored what would help her move into her preferred story. I asked Talk, "What would help you in class so you're not nervous?" Mary picked up Talk, listened, and responded, "He said to let the teacher ask me easy questions so that I could talk." I asked, "So Talk, do you think that would work? If the teacher asked you easy questions you would be able to talk?" Mary picked up Talk and said, "He said yes." I followed up by asking, "What else do you think might help you if you are nervous?" Mary picked up Talk and explained, "He said, could you tell the teacher when I go back to class?" In response to Talk, I stated, "Oh, definitely. I will walk with Mary and we will let her teacher know that it would really help you out." Mary exclaimed, "Today!"

Mary was ready to thicken the plot of her preferred story and asked me to help her with this process. Not only did Mary give me permission to collaborate with her teacher on the strategy to ask easy questions, but Mary provided an additional strategy to take power away from Talk by raising her hand in class when she felt like she could answer the question. This third session turned out to be pivotal. For the first time in a year and a half Mary used an audible voice in class.

Mary's choice to overrule Talk in the classroom and to speak was the first of what came to be more exceptions to the problem-saturated "Mary doesn't talk in class" story. From this point on, Mary and I worked to thicken the plot of her preferred story and break down the narrative of Mary's silence in the classroom. Thickening the plot also helps students be prepared for when old problems reenter their lives (Winslade & Monk, 2007) or when other difficulties may block progress. For example, with Mary it was important for her to anticipate classmates' responses to her changing behavior. I asked Talk some questions that helped Mary prepare for this. "What do you think Mary's friends will think when Mary starts using you in class?" "What do you think her teacher will think?" "What do you think Mary will think?" Mary's responses all included the word "proud!"

Narrative counselors also encourage students to thicken the plot of their preferred narratives by retelling them to key people in their lives. Multiple people and systems can then support and be impacted by preferred narratives (Morgan, 2006; Winslade & Monk, 2007). This is called *widening the audience* (Morgan, 2000). One way of widening the audience is using *therapeutic documents* to strengthen unique outcomes and the ongoing development of preferred narratives (Morgan, 2000; White, 1995; Winslade & Monk, 2007). School counselors can do this by writing letters to students, working with students to write letters to key people in their lives, creating certificates of achievements, assisting students in writing stories of their successes, and gaining

permission from students to publish their stories or letters to help others (Eppler & Carolan, 2005; Morgan, 2006; Oliver, Nelson, Cade, & Cueva, 2007; Winslade & Monk, 2007). According to McKenzie and Monk (1997), therapeutic documents can serve as the equivalent of five good counseling sessions and support a number of purposes. They can solidify positive change, validate

(level 5). Mary kept this chart on her desk. Every time she was able to work with Talk at a classroom level voice (4 on her talking scale) her teacher gave her a sticker to put on her chart. Some weeks Mary earned no new stickers; other weeks Mary proudly showed off five new stickers. After Mary successfully received ten stickers on her chart, she widened her audience even further by hosting a celebration party in the coun-

Narrative Group Counseling

Students struggling with a variety of issues can benefit from narrative groups (Olson et al., 2007; Winslade & Monk, 2007) and groups can also be an efficient use of school counselors' time (ASCA, 2012a). For example, if multiple referrals regarding bullying come to light, rather than working with each student individually, a Bully Buster Club that supports students working together to combat the problem may be indicated. For students struggling with academic failure, a group that focuses on building strengths, positive reputations, and academic skills can have a powerful impact because students are given tools to separate themselves from Failure (Winslade & Monk, 2007).

> ## FOR STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH ACADEMIC FAILURE, A GROUP THAT FOCUSES ON BUILDING STRENGTHS, POSITIVE REPUTATIONS, AND ACADEMIC SKILLS CAN HAVE A POWERFUL IMPACT BECAUSE STUDENTS ARE GIVEN TOOLS TO SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM FAILURE.

competencies, and convey the belief that students play an important role in what happens to them (Olson et al., 2007). They can also help teachers and principals see students in a more positive light (DeKruyf, 2008; Walther & Fox, 2012). For example, the student struggling with Failure could write a declaration addressed to teachers and principals outlining changes being made in opposition to Failure.

Mary and I co-authored a therapeutic document that we called *Book of Talking Tips*. This book gave Mary something concrete to reference when she needed encouragement and reminded her of what she had done to work successfully with Talk—even after we stopped meeting. For Mary, her book of talking tips also communicated her strategies with her teacher and parents and affirmed the changes Mary had already made. In addition, Mary gave me permission to share the talking tips with other students who might have similar problems.

Another way Mary widened her audience was to include her classroom teacher by using a 5-point talking chart in her classroom. Mary literally drew what Talk looked like as a low, quiet voice (level 1) to a loud, shouting voice

seling office with three classmates she personally invited. After Mary's celebration party, my work with her continued intermittently over a 4-month period with brief check-ins, which served as booster sessions for her preferred narrative of talking in the classroom. Mary's academic and personal/social development continued to blossom.

WIDENING THE NARRATIVE IMPACT

The case study with Mary focuses largely on supporting students in an individual setting. Other venues for providing direct services to students include groups and classroom guidance, while indirect services include advocating and consulting with teachers and other school stakeholders (ASCA, 2012a; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hays, 2007). A narrative approach can be effective in each of these aspects of a comprehensive school counseling program. Following are examples of a narrative perspective at work in groups, classroom guidance, and advocating and consulting.

Below, we sketch out a group format adapted from Monk and Paulsen (n.d.) that taps into the narrative posture of curious questioner. After discussing confidentiality and group rules during a first group session, group members each identify an ongoing problem, worry, or difficulty that brings them to group that they would be willing to work on with the group. Naming the problem is next. For example, a student confused about making good relationship choices might name her whirl of confusion "Tornado." Questions can help with the naming process. "How does the problem bring you down? What does the problem get you to do? What areas of your life does the problem invade? How would you prefer things to be?" (Monk & Paulsen, n.d.). Student responses to these questions may well inject some levity into a session that could otherwise be heavy. Balloons, drawings, name tags, play dough, puppets, masks, or even dress-up clothing items can all be incorporated into the externalization process (Freeman et al., 1997).

This externalization process is followed by dividing the group into triads. Each group member takes on one of the following roles: (a) an Investigative Reporter who will interview the Problem, (b) the Problem, who will in turn brag or come clean about its influence in the life of the Student, and (c) the Student beset by a given prob-

lem (Monk & Paulsen, n.d.). These roles turn students into active participants and help make more concrete the externalization of their problems. In addition, the Investigative Reporter role is essentially the curious stance taken by narrative counselors. Teaching students to take on this role themselves in relation to their problems can be a valuable skill they can also use in the future.

The students play out these roles in four interviews (Monk & Paulsen, n.d.). Depending on the makeup of the group and the space available, each type of interview could happen simultaneously or one at a time.

During interviews #1 and #2, the Investigative Reporter asks the Problem questions about its successes and failures while the Student observes (see Appendix A for worksheets). Interviews are most effective when students get into character. For example in Interview #1, the student role-playing Tornado should not be shy about Tornado's power and influence in wreaking havoc on the Student's life. In contrast, during Interview #2, Tornado needs to admit, perhaps reluctantly, what techniques the Student uses to threaten its control. For example, "When [Student's name] talks face-to-face instead of online, I can't confuse her about the intentions of the person she's communicating with nearly as well."

After these initial interviews, the Student finally weighs in, responding to such questions as: What was it like for you when [Problem's name] was being interviewed? How was the interview about the Problem's successes different than the interview about the Problem's failures? Reflecting on their answers can make the externalization of the problem truly sink in for students. Hearing themselves and others in the group talk about problems as separate from themselves can be empowering.

In Interviews #3 and #4, the Investigative Reporter interviews the Student while the Problem observes. The Reporter's questions are designed to undermine the influence of the Problem by not only helping the

Student explore behaviors, intentions, and feelings, but also through exploring the Student's values, commitments, and strengths (see Appendix B). This process can encourage students to face their Y in the road and identify alternatives to their problems.

When debriefing after Interviews #3 and #4, the Problem has an opportunity to respond. "What was it like for you to listen as [Student's name] was being interviewed?" A question for the Student could be "What was it like to name the actions and strengths you can take in opposition to [Problem's name]?"

To solidify and remind students of the successes they claimed over their problems, group members can write letters to themselves in the final session. They could also widen the audience by writing letters or by using digital media to create some form of therapeutic documentation to send to people in their lives who could support them in their continued work against the problem.

Narrative Classroom Guidance
Individuals and small groups have reputations. Entire classes can have them, too. For example, a classroom could have the reputation of having an infectiously bad attitude or its students might be known for being consistently uncooperative or too interpersonally aggressive. Instead of working with individuals or small groups, school counselors can support prosocial behavior with all students using classroom guidance focused on personal/social development (ASCA, 2004). Supporting students' social and emotional learning can positively impact students' academic achieve-

ment (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011). One way this happens is that "prosocial children create...school environments that are conducive to academic learning" (Caprara et al., 2000, p. 305) by building positive relationships with each other and with the adults in the room. When a classroom is not a safe place or when a pervasively bad attitude rules, academic achievement may be negatively impacted (Suh & Suh, 2007).

A narrative approach offers a creative way to work with students

> ## NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES CAN HELP CLASSES . . . DISCOVER TOOLS TO COUNTER THE IMPACT OF A VARIETY OF PROBLEMS IN THEIR CLASSROOMS, RANGING FROM BULLY PREVENTION TO DRUG EDUCATION.

in a classroom setting to address such issues. Narrative techniques can help classes find the language to describe problem stories and discover tools to counter the impact of a variety of problems in their classrooms, ranging from bully prevention to drug education (Winslade & Monk, 2007). An interview format similar to the small group outlined earlier in this article is one way to provide a class the necessary space to examine a problem in a format that can be engaging and fun. Below, we offer another classroom guidance format that school counselors could use in collaboration with teachers to develop a 3-day classroom unit that would help address classroom climate.

On day one, students brainstorm words that describe their class's reputation. Either the teacher or school counselor creates a word cloud from these student-generated class reputation descriptors. A word cloud is a visual collection of words that shows viewers at a glance which words were used most often. Larger words equal greater frequency. The largest words

in this word cloud indicate a dominant story line.

On day two, the teacher or school counselor facilitates a discussion of the word cloud. Out of this discussion a name for a dominant descriptor may emerge. For example, in a class where a negative attitude prevails, a name such as Attitude Dude may be apt. Exploring Attitude Dude's impact on individuals in the class and on the class as a whole would come next. For example, Attitude Dude can get in the

tor chooses to post questions around the room, groups might then respond to each question on a separate piece of paper that they hang on the wall along with all other groups' responses to that question. A high-tech student response system could enable each group's responses to be posted electronically for all to see. This can be a playful approach to dealing with the problem that flips the classroom dynamic upside down. The disobedient rowdiness that has been a problem

discipline referrals, improved attendance, observed kindnesses, and positive student-bystander interventions. School counselors should collect pre and post data related to behavioral referrals, detentions, suspensions, or attendance rates to evaluate the impact of the curriculum (ASCA, 2012a).

Narrative Consultation and Advocacy

A narrative approach to school counseling is not simply a way of doing; rather, it is a way of seeing, a perspective (Monk et al., 1997). As such it is applicable to consultation and advocacy (Winslade & Monk, 2007), important parts of a professional school counselor's job (ASCA, 2012a; Ratts et al., 2007). In relation to advocacy, the ASCA School Counselor Competencies (2012b) call on school counselors to apply "the school counseling themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration and systemic change," and to "advocate... for student success" (I-B-1c; I-B-3). Ratts and colleagues (2007) called on school counselors to implement the ACA Advocacy Competencies in order to promote "access and equity for all students" (p. 90). In relation to consultation, the competencies specify that professional school counselors share "strategies that support student achievement with parents, teachers, other educators and community organizations" (IV-B-5a), and that they work "with education stakeholders to better understand student needs and to identify strategies that promote student achievement" (IV-B-5c).

One way that school counselors support student achievement and advocate for student success is to help teachers and parents in working with students who are referred for behavioral problems or possible mental health issues. Behavior checklists or functional behavior assessments often come into play. Unfortunately these documents tend to focus primarily on the negative, the problem, and can keep us from seeing what students are doing right (Nylund, 2000). We can forget that words— particularly words on official looking

> ADVOCATING FOR REVISIONS OF IN-HOUSE REFERRAL FORMS OR BEHAVIOR CHECKLISTS TO INCLUDE STUDENT STRENGTHS CAN SHIFT PERSPECTIVES AND OPEN EYES TO A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE.

way of students showing what they know and have learned. Attitude Dude can trick students into being unkind to each other. When Attitude Dude consistently gets elementary students to behave badly or not complete school work, a missed recess might be a classroom consequence. For uncooperative middle schoolers, a negative consequence could include a canceled field trip or letters sent home. Detentions or suspensions might be negatives for high schoolers acting out. An across-the-board outcome could be poorer academic achievement.

After the classroom discussion, the teacher or school counselor writes a letter to Attitude Dude or posts questions for the class to address (see Appendix C for a sample letter). On the third day, the class breaks into small groups. Each group takes on the role of Attitude Dude. This works best if students are all addressed as Attitude Dude rather than by their own names—using hats, sunglasses, nametags, or other symbols can help students get into character. Each group responds collaboratively in some way to the letter or posted questions. A collaborative group-generated letter is one response option. If the facilita-

is now the required obedient behavior. To conclude the day's activity, the teacher or school counselor should review Attitude Dude's failures and weaknesses with the class; this can help lead students to the Y in the road and start to identify ways to topple Attitude Dude's influence.

This discussion of Attitude Dude's weak spots leads into individual written reflection that students can do as homework or in class. Prompts to guide this written reflection could include "Write about a time when Attitude Dude was calling the shots, but then you took back control" (see Appendix B for other prompts). The goal of this written reflection is to undermine the strength and influence of the problem and empower students to identify their strengths in relation to the problem.

A culminating activity provides students with another opportunity to respond to Attitude Dude. Student-initiated videos, writings, and artwork can document the class's preferred reputation (Morgan, 2000) and can positively impact the classrooms' culture (Esquivel et al., 2010). When a class chooses a preferred reputation, this may be evidenced by fewer

documents—have the power to "create people's lives, not just describe them" (Winslade & Monk, 1999, p. 117). School counselors are change agents. Advocating for revisions of in-house referral forms or behavior checklists to include student strengths can shift perspectives and open eyes to a more complete picture (Berndt, Dickerson, & Zimmerman, 1997).

Nylund (2000) did just this with teacher and parent symptom rating scales for children suspected of struggling with ADHD. He developed the SMART rating scales to subjectively identify a child's strengths and abilities apart from ADHD (see Appendices D and E). Tipping the scales away from a primarily negative focus towards one that also values children's strengths and abilities can help us avoid totalizing descriptions (Winslade & Monk, 2007). We too easily default to language such as "the F-kids" or "at-risk students." We also have a difficult time separating students from diagnostic labels, such as "depression" or "ADHD" (Wiest et al., 2001).

SMART stands for:
- "Separating the problem...from the child,
- Mapping the influence of...[the problem] on the child and family,
- Attending to exceptions to the...[problem] story,
- Reclaiming special abilities of children..., and
- Telling and celebrating the new story" (Nylund, 2000, p. 50).

This mnemonic can be used as a guide for narrative consultation in general (Nylund, 2000). For example, when mapping the influence of the problem, useful questions might be, "What percentage of time does the problem take over?" and "In what areas is its influence strongest?" (Berndt, Dickerson, & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 445). Inquiring when a problem was not in charge is an example of attending to exceptions to the problem, and can encourage teachers to align with the student against the problem (Berndt, Dickerson, & Zimmerman, 1997; Walther & Fox).

When consulting with teachers and parents, school counselors should be mindful that the questions asked point to what will be found. If questions are only about deficits, deficits are what will emerge; if questions are SMART, there may be more space for alternative preferred stories to develop. Furthermore, the language school counselors use during consultation can create opportunities for advocacy. "How we speak is an important determinant of how we can be in the world. So what we say, and how we say it, matter" (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, p. 34).

CONCLUSION

A narrative perspective offers professional school counselors a useful lens through which to view and do their work. This lens can help students, teachers, parents, and other school stakeholders see problems apart from people, thereby opening up space to collaboratively recognize and re-author preferred stories. A narrative approach can be effective in working with students on issues such as academic achievement, mental health, and personal/social development. It can be used in individual and group counseling and in classroom guidance. It can also influence how school counselors engage in consultation and advocacy. A narrative perspective can help school counselors and others watch for, work with, and witness change in students. ◼

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EXTERNALIZING & MAPPING THE INFLUENCE!

In Groups of Three: (1) **Investigative Reporter**   (2) **The Problem**   (3) **The Student**

Interview #1: **Investigative Reporter** interviews **Problem** about its **successes:**

● How do you influence the student's life?

● When are you the strongest?

● What strategies do you use?

● What are your special qualities or skills?

● What is your purpose?

● Who stands with you against the student?

Interview #2: **Investigative Reporter** interviews **Problem** about its **failures:**

● Where are you the weakest in the student's life?

● What techniques does the student use to threaten your control?

● What are the student's special qualities or skills that threaten your control?

● Why does the student want to challenge you (the Problem)?

● What goals does the student have and/or what does the student do that is most frustrating to your (the Problem's) dreams and hopes?

● Who stands with the student against you (the Problem)?

● What options are available to the student to topple your influence?

Note. Adapted from *Plots and Counterplots! Narrative in Schools*, by G. Monk and N. Paulsen, n.d., workshop handout at the Washington School Counseling Association Conference, Seattle, WA. Used with permission.

UNDERMINING THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROBLEM!

In original triads, the **Investigative Reporter** interviews the **Student** while the **Problem** observes.

Interview #3: Action questions (help explore behaviors, intentions, and feelings about behaviors):

- Tell me about a time when X (call the Problem by its name) happened, but you took back control.
- Tell me about a time when X could have happened but didn't.
- What did you do? (When no completed actions are available, ask about intentions or desires.)
- Can you tell me a bit more about it? (who, what, when, where)
- What led up to this?
- How did you prepare?
- How much thinking did you do about it?
- How did you feel afterwards? Why?
- What else did you do?

Interview #4: Identity questions (help explore values, commitments, beliefs, desires, intentions, and strengths):

- So are you the sort of person who values Y? (refer to above action taken in opposition to the problem)
- When you were doing/thinking Y, what do you think this says about what you think is important?
- What does this tell you about yourself?
- When did you first notice this about yourself? What else?
- If (name of person) knew of what you did, what would they say about the type of person you are, the sort of qualities you have as a person?
- Who would be the most/least surprised? Why?
- What would they say this says about what you want for your life?

Note. Adapted from *Plots and Counterplots! Narrative in Schools*, by G. Monk and N. Paulsen, n.d., workshop handout at the Washington School Counseling Association Conference, Seattle, WA. Used with permission.

Dear Attitude Dude,

You have been making a big impact on the class and you are making it difficult for students to learn! I'm wondering, what are your hopes and dreams for the students in this class? How do you trick students into supporting your goals?

I know students don't always listen to you, Attitude Dude. What do students do that challenge you? Who is standing with the students against you? What options are available to students to topple your influence?

Thank you for sharing . . .

Sincerely,
The Classroom Teacher
The School Counselor

SMART PARENT RATING SCALE.

Child's Name: _____ Gender: _____

Birthdate: _____Age: _____ School Grade: _____
Month/Day/Year

Parent's Name(s): _____ Today's Date: _____

Instructions: Below are a number of common skills that help children succeed at home. Please rate each item according to the student's behavior in the last month. For each item, ask yourself, "How much does this apply to my child?" and circle the best answer for each one. If none, not at all, seldom, or very infrequently, you would circle 0. If the item is very much true or occurs very often or frequently, you would circle 3. You would circle 1 or 2 for ratings in between. Please respond to each item.

		NOT TRUE AT ALL	JUST A LITTLE TRUE	PRETTY MUCH TRUE	VERY MUCH TRUE
1.	Attentive	0	1	2	3
2.	Able to control anger	0	1	2	3
3.	Can complete homework	0	1	2	3
4.	Is tireless	0	1	2	3
5.	Maintains attention with things he/she is interested in	0	1	2	3
6.	Respectful with adults	0	1	2	3
7.	Shows honesty	0	1	2	3
8.	Completes chores	0	1	2	3
9.	Can control in malls or while grocery shopping	0	1	2	3
10.	Gets along with siblings	0	1	2	3
11.	Follows house rules	0	1	2	3
12.	Shows good appetite	0	1	2	3
13.	Feels part of the family	0	1	2	3
14.	Accepts blame for mistakes	0	1	2	3
15.	Is creative, has special abilities	0	1	2	3
16.	Good at the computer	0	1	2	3
17.	Tolerates criticism well	0	1	2	3
18.	Able to think before acting	0	1	2	3
19.	Can focus on more than one thing at a time	0	1	2	3
20.	Sleeps OK for age	0	1	2	3
21.	Demonstrates a sense of fair play	0	1	2	3
22.	Can wait in lines or await turn in games or group situations	0	1	2	3
23.	Is physically healthy	0	1	2	3
24.	Gets up in the morning OK	0	1	2	3
25.	Accepts compliments well	0	1	2	3
26.	Is curious, likes to learn	0	1	2	3
27.	Is good with his/her hands	0	1	2	3

Child's Name: _____ Gender: _____

Birthdate: _____Age: _____ School Grade: _____
Month/Day/Year

Parent's Name(s): _____ Today's Date: _____

Instructions: Below are a number of common skills that help children succeed in school. Please rate each item according to the student's behavior in the last month. For each item, ask yourself, "How much does this apply to the child?" and circle the best answer for each one. If none, not at all, seldom, or very infrequently, you would circle 0. If the item is very much true or occurs very often or frequently, you would circle 3. You would circle 1 or 2 for ratings in between. Please respond to each item.

		NOT TRUE AT ALL	JUST A LITTLE TRUE	PRETTY MUCH TRUE	VERY MUCH TRUE
1.	Attentive, able to focus	0	1	2	3
2.	Co-operates with my instructions	0	1	2	3
3.	Able to sit still when given a subject he or she is interested in	0	1	2	3
4.	Remembers what he/she has already learned	0	1	2	3
5.	Able to make and keep friends	0	1	2	3
6.	Respectful to adults	0	1	2	3
7.	Shows maturity for age	0	1	2	3
8.	Good in spelling	0	1	2	3
9.	Can remain still	0	1	2	3
10.	Tireless, results oriented	0	1	2	3
11.	Respects the rights of others	0	1	2	3
12.	Is able to harness energy into productive activities such as athletics	0	1	2	3
13.	Reading is up to par	0	1	2	3
14.	Demonstrates ability to learn	0	1	2	3
15.	Is artistic	0	1	2	3
16.	Pays attention to things he/she is really interested in	0	1	2	3
17.	Is effective when given choice to be his or her own boss; is independent	0	1	2	3
18.	Shows interest in schoolwork	0	1	2	3
19.	Eager to try new things; gets excited	0	1	2	3
20.	Controls temper outbursts	0	1	2	3
21.	Is creative, curious, intuitive	0	1	2	3
22.	Good in arithmetic	0	1	2	3
23.	Is results oriented	0	1	2	3
24.	Can play or engage in leisure activities quietly	0	1	2	3
25.	Willing to take risks	0	1	2	3
26.	Does follow through on instruction and finishes schoolwork	0	1	2	3
27.	Has special abilities	0	1	2	3
28.	Is good at the computer	0	1	2	3