

# **Facilitating solutions focused dialogue to promote change in school communities**

with

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**9<sup>th</sup> Educational Psychology Forum 21-22  
November 2016 - Albany**

## **Title:**

Facilitating solutions focused dialogue to promote change in school communities

## **Presenters:**

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## **Biography:**

Joanne Marshall (Counselling Psychologist) and Josh Couperus (Educational Psychologist) are employed by the Ministry of Education and are Regional Practitioners in the Positive Behaviour for Learning – School Wide team in the Central South Region. Joanne and Josh are both passionate about the work they currently do and enjoy exploring and implementing strengths-based approaches.

## **Abstract:**

As psychologists working within an educational setting we are frequently requested to provide 'advice and guidance' to school communities on a range of 'challenging issues', from individual student level through to systems interventions including organisational and culture change. Despite literature and practice in many respects having shifted from an expert and problem-saturated model to a more collaborative and strengths-based approach, we are still too often viewed as 'the experts who will solve the problem' (Fox, 2009, Wilding & Griffy, 2015). In this workshop we intend to explore a model of intervention which looks at using solutions focused frameworks to promote change in a school community. The workshop is designed to be interactive and use activities to facilitate the exploration and development of solutions focused thinking and skills with participants to encourage and promote change in practice.

## Quotes

Change happens by people who experience themselves as competent and successful. Change comes not from understanding why you got stuck, but rather from seeing yourself differently and seeing the possibility of change. Seeing yourself differently can result from:

- Experiencing oneself acting differently
- Recognising times one is already acting differently and/or
- Constructing a picture of what being different can be like (Durant, 2016).

In the solutions focused approach, it is the responsibility of the practitioner to ask questions that will be useful for the client. When we are asked a question, we very quickly try to find an answer for it. It is a natural response. For example, what did you have for breakfast this morning? You can quickly give an answer, and note that you were not thinking about your breakfast until you were asked about it. The solution focused approach takes advantage of this and seeks to ask the right questions to orient the client to a desired future rather than focussing on their problem (Shennan, 2014).

"We may be solution focused but we are not problem phobic. When practitioners become "problem deniers", their work becomes solution forced and it is clear that solution forced work does not work" (Nylund & Corsiglia, 1994 cited in Ratner et al., 2012, p.160).

"The connection between people's strengths and their aspirations is the key to every successful action for change. Whether or not we are aware of them or appreciate them, we all have strengths and capacities that can help transform our lives. Stories about our strengths give us a sense of how things might be and ideas about how to bring about the changes we want. The emphasis on deficits does not provide the insights, learning and hopefulness that a focus on strengths and capacities does" (Gashen, 2014 pp.5-10).

"Talking is not a neutral activity. How we talk about events in ourselves can change how we are. Talk constructs the future and change. The problems are already constructed, what matters is constructing solutions" (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000, cited in Milner & Bateman, 2011 p.11).

## Activity

Person 1 will interview person 2 about something that was a recent problem for him/her. You can choose something from work that is or has been a recent problem and that you are willing to talk about. This is NOT a role play and you are not being a “client”. If in groups of 3, then person 3 is the observer.

1. The Interviewers job is to get as much detail as possible about the problem, so you can make a detailed assessment of how serious it is and so you can offer ideas on what to do to help “fix” it.

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2. Now your job is to ask about how person 2 may like things to be different in that situation (or next time). The aim is to get as much detail as possible about what will be happening when this situation is different, is handled differently, is solved etc.

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Adapted from (Durrant, 2016)

## Questions

### Asking for details (amplifying) about what's working:

- How does that work?
- When is it working (even just a bit)?
- How do you do that exactly?
- When are things better?
- It sounds terrible... when are the times you feel like you handled it even better?
- Is that new for you?
- How are you doing that?
- What effect does that have on...?
- What will be different between you and ...?
- How does that make a difference
- What would others say is different?

### Do more of it:

- What is needed for you to do that again and more often?
- If absolutely nothing is better: How do you cope?
- How do you get through that?
- If you can continue to get through that would you have accomplished what you want?

### Exceptions:

With every situation where a person experiences difficulties, there will always be times when the problem is not present or hasn't been experienced. Problems do not exist 100% of the time. Questions that seek to identify exceptions include:

- Has there ever been a time when this difficulty was not around/or present, even for a brief period?
- What were you doing then?
- When do you not feel (anxious/sad/burdened)...?
- When have you noticed yourself smiling/feeling better/happy despite the problem being present?

### Coping questions:

- How do you suppose you have coped with do many difficult situations you were just describing?
- Most people would have given up a long time ago, what keeps you going/
- What is it about you that got you through such trying circumstances without giving up hope?

### A focus on future success:

- What will be the first sign to you that things are better?
- How do you want things to be?

- So when you are handling this the way you want to, what will be happening? What will you be doing differently? What will others notice that is different about you?
- Let's imagine that this difficulty is solved... what will be happening? How will you know? (get as detailed and concrete as possible picture of what it will be like)

### Assuming movement and change:

#### Scaling question

Scaling is a useful tool to help your client to assess where they see themselves in relation to a situation they may be experiencing difficulty in and to identify small steps they can take to improve the situation. It begins by asking the person where they see themselves on a scale of 0 – 10 where 0 is the worst possible situation, and 10 is the best. After they have done this, there are a series of questions that can be asked to explore what steps they can take to improve their situation. These questions could include:

- Why did you place yourself at that number?
- Why not one higher?
- Why not one lower?
- What will be happening when you are one step higher?
- Who will notice? What will they notice?
- What's the highest you have ever been? How did you do that?
- What do we need to do to help you move up the scale?

Clients are then able to assess their progress over time and see the small improvements they are making as they move up from one step to the next.

#### The Miracle question

The miracle question is a very useful tool to help your clients to focus on how they wish the future to be, and to bring this future into the present, focussing in on what they might be doing differently. The miracle question takes many forms however it usually goes something like...

*"Suppose tonight, while you were asleep a miracle occurred and your problem had completely disappeared. Because you were asleep when the miracle occurred, you don't know that it has happened. When you awake tomorrow, what would be some of the things you would notice that would tell you life had suddenly gotten better?"*

Additional questions to explore:

- What would people notice about you?
- What would you be doing differently
- What would you notice when you woke up, had breakfast, drove to work, arrived at work, went home?...

For a good explanation of the Miracle Question you can start by looking at :

<http://www.solutionfocused.net/what-is-solution-focused-therapy/>

## Books & Articles:

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Adams, M. (2016). ENABLE: A solution-focused coaching model for individual and team coaching. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 12(1) , 17-23.

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Durrant, M. (2016). Supervision: Building strengths, developing competencies: A 2-Day Workshop. *Seminar notes* (pp. 1-51). Rotorua: Compass.

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Vollaire, L., Hicks, J., & Growe, R. (2011). Solution-focused brief therapy: An interventional approach to improving negative student behaviours. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 38(4) , 224-234.

Wilding, L. &. (2015). The strength-based approach to educational psychology practice: A critique from social constructionist and systemic perspectives. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31(1) , 43-44.

Wilding, L., & Griffey, S. (2015). The strength-based approach to educational psychology practice: a critique from social constructionist and systemic perspectives. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 31(1) , 43-55.

### Websites:

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- <http://www.positivepsychology.org.nz>
- <http://www.solutionfocused.net/what-is-solution-focused-therapy/>
- <http://www.barrywinbolt.com/solution-focused-thinking/what-is-solution-focused-brief-therapy/>

### Other Resources:

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- Strength cards
- Strength cards for Kids
- The Scaling Kit

All from Innovative Resources



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