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**A PEER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GROUP:
A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORUM**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
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at
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Abstract

In response to the challenges of academic work when studying for Masters of Counselling degrees at a distance from the university while living in a geographically isolated community in Aotearoa New Zealand, Kandyce Bevan, Nicola Carroll and I came together to work in a peer professional learning group. This thesis tells the stories of how we worked together, and what we did when we worked together. Although our original intentions in working together were to help each other with our university studies and practise counselling skills, what we achieved was the provision of a forum for performing, audiencing, and authenticating our fledgling professional identities and knowledge in the liminal phase of the rite of passage between being positioned as students at university and full immersion in professional practice.

Nicola, Kandyce and I collaborated in deciding the focus, research question, and method for this project. We drew on the practices and postmodern philosophies of narrative therapy in our deliberations. Accordingly, social constructionism, post-structuralism, discourse and positioning theories underpin this project. The method chosen was a bricolage of qualitative research methods: co-operative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, narrative inquiry, and participatory action research.

We met five times for this project. The first three meetings were to decide and refine the focus of the project, the research question and the method. The fourth meeting was the main data-generating conversation. In the fifth meeting Nicola and Kandyce were invited to comment on, and contribute to, the stories I had constructed from our conversations.

The key finding of this project was that it is important, useful, and indeed may be necessary, for students learning a postmodern approach to counselling to have an appropriate forum outside the university in which their fledgling professional identities and knowledge can be performed, audienced and authenticated. Many students will be able to engage supervisors with a matched paradigm for the purpose of such performances. However, in the absence of supervisors who know narrative practice, such performance of professional identity may not be possible. A peer professional learning group, such as ours, may not be able to fulfil all of the functions of supervision, but it can provide a forum to contribute significantly to the shaping of professional identity. It can also provide a safe place to practise counselling skills ethically, and act as a crucible for the co-construction of knowledge.

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The rite of passage that has brought me to the point of writing this thesis began in 1999 with my determination to take up work as a counsellor. I have been helped by many people through this passage, not least by the clients I have had the privilege of working with.

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Chapter One – Introduction

... I get by with a little help from my friends ... (The Beatles, 1967, track 2)

In 2008, as a new practitioner engaged in masters education in Gisborne, a rural community in Aotearoa New Zealand, I was keen to take up the invitation of support from a colleague, Kandyce Bevan (Ngati Porou). Kandyce was in the cohort ahead of me on the MCouns. programme at the University of Waikato, and she also lived in Gisborne. We were joined in 2009 by another Gisborne resident, Nicola Carroll, who began the MCouns. programme in that year. This study examines our group of three, and what the group offered us in the particular context of our professional lives and our geographical position. While I am not putting forward some new practice model here, what I am offering is a detailed account from a small piece of local research. My hope is that in that detail others may find something that will be useful in shaping and maintaining a peer professional support group.

We just thought of ourselves as a group of colleagues. We did not give our group a label or category until I came to do this study. The first question we asked ourselves was, “what do we call this group?” We agreed, after I had also had a conversation with Dr Kathie Crocket (the supervisor of this research project, and also Nicola’s university programme supervisor and teacher), that we would call ourselves a “peer professional learning group”. We considered ourselves peers in that we were all student counsellors learning a narrative approach to counselling; we considered ourselves ‘always becoming’ (May, 2005) in developing our identities as professionals; and there was a strong element of learning from each other in the work we have done, and continue to do.

As a member of our group, I had discussed, over some time, my research interests with Nicola and Kandyce. This research project, which explores how and what our peer professional learning group has contributed to our professional identities and counselling practices, arose out of discussions with them, and also with Kathie. In order to provide some compass points from which to navigate the exploration, I thought a bricolage of qualitative research methods might be useful. The stitching together of co-operative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, narrative inquiry, and participatory action research opened space for rich storying. My colleagues Kandyce and Nicola worked with me using narrative therapy

conversation skills to encourage this storytelling. We met five times over the course of a year. In the first three meetings we collaborated in setting the focus for this research project as well as deciding on the method we would use to explore it. The fourth meeting was the main data-generating conversation. In the final meeting I asked Nicola and Kandyce the questions that had come up for me while writing Chapters Four, Five and Six. At this meeting we also discussed the accounts I had written. I subsequently integrated their feedback into this thesis. We collaborated as much as we could at every stage of the research. Both transcripts and chapters were edited by Kandyce and Nicola.

Our coming together as a group was a “negotiated response to [our] situation” (Wenger, 1998, p. 77). I have written above about our location in a rural community. Our common location was the primary reason Kandyce reached out to me in the beginning (see Chapter Five). My sense of isolation - being so far from the university and my colleagues there, and working in a community where there was unfamiliarity with narrative practices and a postmodern approach, and the newness of working with a narrative approach – meant that I was keen to engage with Kandyce, as was Nicola to engage with us both. We were all at intersections. Kandyce was at the intersection of taking up a new identity claim as a counsellor and, in particular, as a narrative therapist, when her previous professional identity had been as a teacher. Nicola was also taking up a new identity as a counsellor and a narrative therapist. I was already working as a counsellor, but I was a learner of narrative practice. We became passionate about our time and work together. As I write this account of the beginnings of our group, I acknowledge the voices of Kandyce and Nicola who have helped me piece together this story in response to what became a collaboratively-produced research question: *How and what has this peer professional learning group contributed to its members’ professional identity and counselling practice?*

Rationale

Counsellor research

The New Zealand Association of Counsellors’ (NZAC) Code of Ethics (2002, clause 11.1(a)) encourages counsellors to “promote and facilitate evaluation and research in order to inform and develop counselling practice.”

There are many good reasons for counsellors to research their practices –

“accountability, self-reflection to enhance one’s practice, personal challenge and career enhancement, cultivating a critical state of mind, and adding to the general pool of knowledge and clinical practices” (Manthei, 2004, p. 72). Kandyce, Nicola and I hope that this thesis will contribute to the body of knowledge about counselling practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, through this investigation about how peers can work together to support client practice and professional learning.

Supervision

Professional supervision, according to the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (2008), is “a primary resource in the maintenance and development of safe, ethical and effective practice” (Clause 1.2). Supervision is mandated for all NZAC members. However, there is no mention in the Code of Ethics about the importance of the supervisor and practitioner sharing the same paradigm (see below). Instead, emphasis is placed on the number of years a supervisor has been a full member of NZAC – a minimum of three – and the length of time the practitioner has been engaging the supervisor for supervision – a minimum of one year (NZAC, 2008). I believe that emphasis should also be given to the matching of paradigms, particularly for student counsellors. With the coming of registration for counsellors here in Aotearoa New Zealand, policies cannot be far away that describe what it is to be a ‘good enough’ supervisor. Crocket (2001a, p. 79) wrote that it is important to become “active in producing the theories that support our [supervision] practice” in order that we are instrumental in shaping our own practice, rather than simply reproducing the practices we have come to take for granted. My hope is that this research will contribute to the shaping of supervision practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, I hope the findings of this study will help inform the understandings of those who make the policies that will shape supervision requirements for registered counsellors here.

Rural communities and counsellor education

Gisborne is a relatively small, geographically-isolated community. There are other such communities around Aotearoa New Zealand where resources to support counsellor education are scarce. It is our hope that researching the wayshow and what our peer professional learning group has contributed to our professional identities and counselling practices will illustrate ways of resourcing counsellors in contexts like ours, in particular. We hope that the research will also have relevance to students in any settings who wish to use a peer professional

[learning group](#) to support their learning. It may be particularly useful in communities where the matching of paradigms between supervisor and practitioner is not possible.

Paradigm matching in supervision

I have ~~not~~ found ~~much~~ little in the literature about the importance of matching paradigms in supervision. Holloway (1999) wrote that this is an area of practice that “has not received much attention” (p. 27). Vivianne [Flintoff](#) (1997) wrote about the supervision experiences of student counsellors in Aotearoa New Zealand. The students she interviewed spoke of the difficulties in cross-paradigm supervision. For example, ‘Martha’, one of the student-counsellors, said “But I was on the back foot, because part of the theory of the other model, I believe, is the expertise of the person who has that theory...whereas part of the world view of somebody who has got narrative theories is that you’re not an expert” (Flintoff, 1997, p. 83). The difficulties encountered in cross-paradigm supervision are not the focus of this research, but rather we were interested in exploring what has been possible for us in a matched-paradigm postmodern [peer professional learning group](#), particularly in our rural context where a supervisor who practised narrative approaches was not available. With a gap in the [supervision](#) literature about this, we hoped that an illustration of such matched-paradigm professional consultation might be useful.

Supervision practices in Aotearoa New Zealand

In [2001](#), [Crocket](#) noted in her doctoral thesis that there had been very little written about supervision practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the years since Crocket wrote her thesis, more has been written about supervision practices here, but a search of library databases found only a small number of articles, presentations, or theses (A. Baldwin, Patuwai, & Hawken, 2002; Crocket, 2002a, 2002b, 2007; Crocket et al., 2004; Crocket, Gaddis, et al., 2007; Crocket et al., 2009; Esler, 2011; Flintoff & Flanagan, 2010; Hawken, 2004; Hawken & Worrall, 2002; McKenna, 2008; McKinney, 2006; O’Donoghue, 1999, 2002; Wolfe, 2010). The contribution I hoped to make to this field was to show peer supervision in action in our local and national contexts.

Practitioner research

Of the literature I found written about supervision practices in Aotearoa New Zealand, few were written from practitioners' points of view. In 2004, Manthei wrote in the New Zealand Journal of Counsellors that between 1991 and 2000, only 30% of the articles written for that journal were authored by practitioners. He described the need for local and national literature "which rigorously critiques practice and process" as "pressing" (Manthei, 2004, p. 73). Flintoff (1997, p. 2) wrote that "there is a need, and indeed a demand, for local [Aotearoa New Zealand] knowledge to be made available" about supervision practices.

Limits of cross-paradigm supervision

Carroll (1996) considered there to be seven generic tasks of supervision – to evaluate, to monitor professional ethical issues, to counsel, to consult, to monitor administrative aspects, to set up a 'learning relationship', and to teach (p. 53). When supervision is cross-paradigm, and the supervisor does not understand the difference, despite their good intentions and willingness to bridge the gap, the supervisor cannot fulfill all these tasks. However, neither can a peer professional learning group, especially when its members are still student counsellors. We called one of our practices peer supervision, although we were unable to fulfill all of the tasks and functions of supervision. The group's function was professional consultation which had an emphasis on learning. We hoped we practitioners could add to the local and national literature as practitioners offering critical feedback about the real effects that our work together has had on our professional identities and counselling practices.

We hope that, by sharing our stories in this thesis, educators and professional organisations may come to understand the importance of a suitable forum in which students can be supported into professional identity and practice. Our intention is to make things easier for others. We understand that this is a small piece of local research, but ripples do go out into the world. Drawing on Deleuze's writing, May (2005, p. 8) wrote "there is only a question of how one might live". We understand this question, and our choice is to try to make a difference by offering some of our local knowledge.

Theoretical location of this study

As I researched the literature for this study, I became aware of how few authors acknowledged the “paradigm-locatedness” of their work (Crocket, 2002b, p. 158). It was visible to me because my thinking has been transformed by the MCouns. programme. The programme’s teaching was underpinned by a social constructionist framework (Kotzé, 2009). The programme also included references to post-structuralism, discourse theory and positioning theory. These are the theories in which this study is located. I set out key aspects of these theories below. I particularly focus on how these theories construct the concept of identity, since our research question invited a focus on our collaborative contributions to professional identity. These are not the definitive explanations for these theories (if such things exist), but rather guides with which to navigate the ideas put forward in this study. In the final section of this first chapter I offer an overview of this thesis.

Social constructionism

Social constructionism proposes that “what we take to be knowledge of the world and self finds its origins in human relationships” (Gergen, 2011, p. 109). The philosophical assumptions that underpin this idea include the following:

- Rather than accept, or take for granted, that “knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world” (Burr, 2003, p. 3), social constructionism invites us to ask about the cultural, historical, and diachronic (across time) origins of knowledge.
- Our understandings of the world are produced within our cultural, historical, and diachronic locations. What we understand to be knowledge is inextricably tied to the understandings of the people around us about what constitutes that knowledge. Understandings produced in one location or time are no better or worse than understandings produced in any other location or time (Burr, 2003). As Drewery (2000, p. 248) wrote, “no claim to know is the final truth.”
- Knowledge is something that is co-constructed by people in conversation, rather than something that exists in and of itself (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009a). “Therefore what we regard as truth, which of course varies

historically and cross-culturally, may be thought of as our current accepted ways of understanding the world” (Burr, 2003, pp. 4–5).

- Our understandings of the world produce our actions in the world. Some paths of action are available to us, and others are not. Social constructionism pays attention to who decides what constitutes knowledge because inherent in these constitutions are power relations (Burr, 2003).
- Just as our knowledges and understandings of the world are constructed in relationship, so too are our identities. In contrast to modernist ideas of the self as having an essential, and unchangeable personality, social constructionist ideas about identity posit that they are constructed, in relationship, from the discourses that are available to us within our social and cultural locations (Burr, 2003).

Post-structuralism

Like social constructionism, post-structuralism is a move away from the taken-for-granted idea that people and things have an essential nature or structure (Speedy, 2008). Instead, it posits that we construct reality, including our identities, by the use of language (M. Baldwin, 2006). Language is used by people to respond to each other, in relationship. Identity, then, is constructed using language while “in relationship to others, and is shaped by realms of ethics, belief and action” (Morgan, 2002, p. 52). Our identities are seen to be reflections of our intentions, purposes, hopes and dreams, values, and beliefs (Morgan, 2002), all of which have been constructed in relationship with others, our communities, and the wider communities across the world.

Post-structuralism emphasises the fluidity of identity. Rather than identity being fixed, it is an “on-going project of ... construction” which in turn shapes the contexts from which it is being constructed (Clarke, 2008, p. 24). Drawing on Deleuze’s ideas inviting us to conceptualise ourselves as nomads, Winslade (2009, p. 343) wrote of therapy as being “always about becoming other than what we have been, rather than to a becoming more true to who we are.”

Discourses

Postmodern theory includes the concept of discourses. The word ‘discourse’ is commonly used to describe utterances, conversations, the spoken or written word. However, in this thesis, I use the word ‘discourse’ with its

postmodern meaning. In a postmodern sense, all that we say and do is shaped by shared cultural and social ideas which shape the way we perceive, and make sense of, reality. “Discourses are linguistic and social contexts within which certain statements make sense or not. The discursive context of a statement is the set of background assumptions, often hidden or taken for granted, that enable a statement to make sense” (Drewery et al., 2000, p. 249). When we speak, we enact practices that constitute how we perceive reality (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Discourses are productive as well as descriptive (Butler, 1995). That is, they produce behaviour, constituting “*lived* and *actual* experience ... articulat[ing] the possibilities in which subjects achieve intelligibility” (Butler, 1995, p. 143) (emphasis in original). The multiple discourses available to us in our particular contexts and time are all that we have from which to “speak ourselves or be spoken into existence” (Davies, 1991, p. 42). Discourses, then “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 54).

Positioning

The postmodern idea of positioning comes from Hollway’s (1984) writing about the effects of discourses on subjectivity and difference in heterosexual relationships. She wrote,

Discourses make available positions for subjects to take up. These positions are in relation to other people. Like the subject and object of a sentence (and indeed expressed through such a grammar), women and men are placed in relation to each other through the meanings which a particular discourse makes available. (Hollway, 1984, p. 236)

The positions made available, and offered in conversation, are fluid in that they can change from moment to moment (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). When we speak, we always position others while, at the same, positioning ourselves (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). The positions we offer and are offered do not have to be accepted – we can reject positions and position ourselves differently if there are no constraining discourses to prevent this action (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

The concept of positioning is important to this project. Winslade (2005, p. 355) wrote, “it is possible to advance a notion of identity as a product of the clustering of repeated identity positions accepted and taken up in a multitude of

conversations”. The key work of our peer group was the offering of a forum in which we could repeatedly perform our identities, and have them authenticated.

Outline of the chapters

In Chapter Two I have provided a brief survey of the literature which helped me theorise what we have done in our group. I consulted the writing about communities of practice and their connection to identity shaping. I looked at what the various literatures said about peer groups with a focus on peer mentoring and supervision. I briefly looked at what the literature said about the Māori concept of *tuakana/teina*.

Chapter Three shows the steps I took in preparing for this project. I introduce the idea of the *bricolage* and then briefly outline the qualitative inquiry methods I wove together to create a *bricolage*. Then there is an exploration of the ethical matters involved in undertaking this project – consent, confidentiality, and risk of harm. Following this I explain the research process, including a section that looks at how I analysed the data.

Chapter Four, the first results chapter, sets out *how* we worked together as a group. This includes the ways we worked under pressure from discourses of personal failure and competition. We resisted this pressure by setting a receiving context, speaking respectfully, embracing a spirit of learning, and being playful. I explain how we managed to hold the focus of working when we met, rather than allowing our meetings to be only social get-togethers.

Chapter Five, the second results chapter, relates stories of *what* we did when we worked together. We helped each other with our course work, we practised narrative conversation skills, and we consulted each other for peer supervision.

Chapter Six brings Chapters Four and Five together. I make more explicit the implications of our work together for the shaping of our professional identities. I discuss the intersection of newness as counsellors and the place of narrative therapy in the world. I then offer a discussion about identity production in action. To elaborate and illustrate this discussion, I offer an abbreviated excerpt from the transcript of our fourth meeting when we met for the main data-gathering conversation. Calling on the Deleuzian idea of identity as an “always becoming”

(May, 2005; Winslade, 2009), I describe the identity production in action that this transcript shows as an example of “professional identity becoming”.

Chapter Seven is the conclusion where I write of the findings of this study and its implications. I made some recommendations and offer some questions for future research.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

In this chapter, I locate our group and its practices in the literature. I begin by reviewing the literature that supports and expands on Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of "communities of practice". This concept, I believe, encapsulates the ethos of our group. Wenger (1998, p. 149) made a link between communities of practice and identity when he wrote, "There is a profound connection between identity and practice." Since one of the foci of this research is professional identity, I next turn my attention to how the literature depicts a post-structuralist concept of professional identity. I then explore the writing that contributes to current ideas about peers working as mentors and co-learners. Next I review the peer supervision literature. Also included here is a brief exploration of the concept of tuakana/teina.

Communities of practice

Since 'communities of practice' is a theory of learning, a theory of identity, a theory of meaning, a theory of community and a theory of practice, it offers considerable potential for thinking about a community of students whose common enterprise is to learn the practices of [their professional field]. (Clarke, 2008, p. 30)

The term 'communities of practice' was coined by Lave and Wenger (1991) to describe a group whose primary purpose is to learn from each other. Lave and Wenger originally conceived of communities of practice as comprising groups of colleagues with varying degrees of expertise, where new members of the group were mentored by more experienced members until they became 'full' members themselves (St. Clair, 2008). Since 1991, the concept of mentoring and mentored colleagues has been broadened (Hildreth & Kimble, 2008). A community of practice is now generally accepted to be a group of people:

- whose evolution as a group was organic (Cremers & Valkenburg, 2008);
- whose establishment as a group was in response to particular circumstances (Wenger, 1998);
- whose engagement is voluntary, mutual, and reciprocal (St. Clair, 2008);
- who are not positioned as more powerful than each other, but rather as peers and fellow-learners (Boud, 2001);
- who have "a willingness to share knowledge and experience" (Cremers & Valkenburg, 2008, p. 335);

- who have a shared repertoire which includes “the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world” as well as shared “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, [and] actions or concepts” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83);
- who share a passion or concern for something (Cremers & Valkenburg, 2008); and
- who have shared goals, the principal one of which is to produce learning for its members (Habhab-Rave, 2008).

The philosophy informing the concept of communities of practice is the social constructionist idea of learning being “socially situated” (Habhab-Rave, 2008, p. 217). “Learning is ubiquitous in participatory activity” (Habhab-Rave, 2008, p. 229).

The shared goal of learning, that is so central to the ethos of communities of practice, is actioned by “the exchange of practice and experience” (Habhab-Rave, 2008, p. 228). The shared practices of the group define the community (St. Clair, 2008). Group members understand that they do not need to know everything about a particular matter, realising instead that the important part of belonging to the group is that its members are willing to reciprocate in teaching and learning from each other (Wenger, 1998).

In many ways there is an extremely good fit between the way we worked together in our peer professional learning group, and the concept of communities of practice. However, an important ethical matter arises for counsellors working together – that of confidentiality. The literature about communities of practice does not address this issue. However, our group’s work together involves the lives of other people, and we do have a professional responsibility for them. I believe it is very important for counsellors in communities of practice to take care to set an ethical receiving context when speaking of the lives of other people. I think that it is good practice to often remind each other of the need to protect people’s privacy and confidentiality. As in our everyday counselling practice, when working in our group we referred to the recommendations set out in the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002) to guide the work we did in our group. Most often, we consulted the clauses about confidentiality in the Code of Ethics. For example, “Counsellors shall only make exceptions to confidentiality in order to reduce risk” (NZAC, 2002, p. 8, clause 6.2a).

“Identity and practice [are] mirror images of each other” (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). Communities of practice provide a forum for the performance and on-going production of identity. When people interact and recognise each other as belonging to particular communities, then it is possible to witness others’ identity performances, and negotiate one’s own in relation to local and global contexts (Wenger, 1998). For counselling students, for example, locating oneself in relation to these contexts could be conceptualised as a rite of passage, as we story our professional identities.

Communities of practice can provide support for the liminal phase of identity rites of passage as students transition to professional practice (Islam, 2008). White (1995, p. 147), in his writing about women moving out of violent relationships, described this liminal phase as “between known worlds, one in which nothing is as it was...[and where] everything that the novice had previously taken for granted can no longer be taken so.” Crocket (2004, p. 1) subsequently brought this metaphor into professional practice, calling it a “migration of identity”. For student counsellors navigating between theory and practice, identity claims as novice and professional, and modernist and postmodern ways of understanding the world, communities of practice can provide a site for experimentation with new ways of being. Plunging directly into professional life on completion of training forgoes the chance to consolidate learning (Islam, 2008). At the same time, “simply teaching professional skills within [an] educational setting is inadequate to prepare [students] for [the] challenge [of professional life], because while such an approach may present relevant information, it reasserts the student role through the very form of classroom learning” (Islam, 2008, p. 284). Exploring with peers in communities of practice, then, may offer a safe and measured way to navigate across the time it takes to migrate between separating from old ways of being to arriving at new professional identity claims (Islam, 2008).

The shaping of professional identity

Post-structuralist ideas posit that identity is not fixed, but rather something that is co-constructed in relationship (Morgan, 2002). “Indeed, without the cooperation of others in the social sphere, personas cannot be constructed at all” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999a, p. 8). Identity is performed within contexts, and from moment to moment (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999a; Morgan, 2002).

In the negotiation of everyday life, we employ a “multiplicity of social identities” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999b, p. 60). We are never in a state of being one thing or another, but rather we are always in a state of becoming (May, 2005).

Identity is discursively produced (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999b). As the feminist Jill Johnston (1973, cited in Shotter & Gergen, 1989, p. 82) wrote, “identity is what you can say you are according to what they say you can be.” We perform our identities out of the multiple (but limited) discourses that are available to us (Burr, 2003; Davies, 1991). Professional identity, then, can be conceptualised as something that is always being produced by, and/or created from, drawing on the social, historical, cultural, local and global discourses that determine the practices and meaning ascribed to the profession being taken up by the individual (Clarke, 2008).

Professional identity “consist[s] of a set of values, attitudes, ideas, knowledge and skills” (Winslade, 2002, p. 35). These are always being gleaned from the discourses available to the person taking up this identity claim. Professional identity is co-constructed in relationship (Clarke, 2008). For example, on the University of Waikato MCouns. programme, lecturers intentionally scaffold students into the storying and shaping of their professional identities (Crocket & Kotzé, 2011). Discourses that may be taken up in identity claims become available from interactions with lecturers and peers, within the contexts of academic work, the practice of narrative counselling skills in class, supervision, and student work on placement (Crocket & Kotzé, 2011). “We listen carefully to support students to weave between the personal and the professional; between lived experiences and theory; between local knowledges and the academic and professional ideas we teach” (Crocket, Kotzé, & Flintoff, 2007, pp. 30–31). Gergen (2009b, p. 44) wrote of this co-construction of identity, “Through co-action we come into being as individual entities, but the process remains forever incomplete. At any moment there are multiple options, and self-identity remains in motion.” In Chapter Six, I give an example of this identity in motion as Nicola, Kandyce and I work together to further story our professional identities.

Peer groups

Kandyce, Nicola and I did not conceptualise our work together as peer mentoring, or peer supervision at the outset, although Kandyce did use the word

“mentoring” at times, and over the last year we have called our work “peer supervision”. Our group began with Kandyce wanting to support my learning. However, we quickly reached a point in learning counselling where, in order to speak of our learning, we needed to speak about the clients we were working with. The initial practice of support began to incorporate aspects of supervision. There were also aspects of peer mentoring and learning in our work together. Accordingly, I have brought the literature from peer mentoring and learning, and peer supervision into this chapter. All of these activities have strong aspects of reciprocal teaching and learning.

Peer mentoring and learning

There are two conceptualisations of peer mentoring and learning groups. One describes an older, more experienced peer helping a younger one with advice related to particular tasks or functions (Terrion & Leonard, 2007). The other describes peer mentoring as “two or more individuals enter[ing] into a co-equal relationship that supports mutual mentoring for career and psychosocial validation” (Driscoll, Parkes, Tilley-Lubbs, Brill, & Pitts Bannister, 2009, pp. 5–6). It is this second explanation which provides a more “experience-near” (White, 2007, p. 41) description of the way we worked in our group. However, what does not fit with our experiences as student counsellors working together is the lack of attention paid to ethics in the literature about peer mentoring and learning groups. Peers working in such groups may not be governed by the same ethical restraints as we counsellors are when we speak of our professional practice. As counsellors, we are always required to consider matters of confidentiality and privacy.

Peers in peer mentoring and learning groups such as ours engage in coaching, counselling, providing information, and supporting each other in their learning, professional practice, and their lives outside their work (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Peers learn “with and from each other” (Boud, 2001, p. 2). Explaining theoretical ideas to others helps people understand those ideas better themselves (Boud, 2001). There may be more opportunities to practise professional activities in peer groups compared to the limited occasions on university block courses (Boud, 2001).

The non-hierarchical positioning of peers provides a safe forum for experimentation and the development of ideas (McDougall & Beattie, 1997), just as communities of practice do. The safety of this forum is predicated on

continuing performances of trust which sustain the relationships (McDougall & Beattie, 1997). While peer mentoring is usually conceptualised as a business practice, and peer learning an educational practice, peer supervision is more usually associated with the social services (Hawken & Worrall, 2001).

Peer supervision

Ideas about supervision: The purpose of counsellor supervision, according to the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002, p. 11) “is for counsellors to reflect on and develop effective and ethical practice.” The literature seems to be in agreement that ‘good enough’ supervision where counsellors can “reflect and develop effective and ethical practice” should be provided by practitioners who are trained, experienced, competent, and affiliated with a professional body (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; M. Carroll, 1996; Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Feltham & Dryden, 1994; Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Holloway, 1999; NZAC, 2002; York, 1997). There are many approaches to supervision. For example, Carroll (1996) considered there to be seven generic tasks of supervision – to evaluate, to monitor professional ethical issues, to counsel, to consult, to monitor administrative aspects, to set up a ‘learning relationship’, and to teach (p. 53). Carroll (1996) pointed out that the relationship between supervisor and practitioner changes over time. When practitioners are in training, supervision “is characterized by teacher/pupil features”, while the relationship between supervisor and experienced practitioner can be more closely described as “a colleague/colleague relationship” (M. Carroll, 1996, p. 55).

What was rarely visible in the literature about supervision was what Crocket (2001b, p. 158) termed the authors’ “paradigm-locatedness”. Paradigms form frames of reference from which meaning is made - “action is hidden in the unquestioned assumptions of the paradigm” (Patton, 2008, p. 423). The dominant approaches to supervision are embedded in modern technologies of power (White, 2002) which produce ideas such as the importance of confronting practitioners’ ‘deficits’ (Feltham & Dryden, 1994); and the need for someone to have “final authority or clear mandate ... to report any unprofessional behaviour” (Feltham & Dryden, 1994, p. 47). These approaches are “based on the assumption that supervisors have access to privileged information about the therapy, the client or the [practitioner]” (Todd & Storm, 1997, p. 219). However, a postmodern, or

narrative approach to supervision “would not necessarily collude with, or privilege, the professional knowledge of the supervisor” (Speedy, 2000, p. 419).

The discourses concerning the purposes of postmodern supervision are very different from the dominant ideas about supervision. For example, Crockett (2001a, p. 84) wrote of narrative supervision being the “work of negotiating professional identity” and “storying professional identity”. The focus is on what might be possible, rather than what is difficult (Gardner, Bobele, & Biever, 1997). In keeping with postmodern ideas about how reality is constructed, attention is paid to the language used in therapy conversations (Gardner et al., 1997). These ideas about supervision open space for peer practitioners to privilege each other’s “local knowledge” (Geertz, 1983), and to learn from each other about professional practice (Feltham & Dryden, 1994).

Ideas about peer supervision: Any number of peers can form a group for supervision purposes. Where there are two peers working together, each can take a turn as supervisor and consulting practitioner in a reciprocal arrangement (A. Baldwin, Hawken, & Patuwai, 2001; McNicoll, 2001). In three-peer groups, the third person can act as observer and reflector (Hawken & Worrall, 2002). Peer supervision is cost-effective (A. Baldwin et al., 2002; M. Carroll, 1996; McNicoll, 2001). Peers in supervision use their professional skills (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996) to help each other facilitate, develop and maintain the “safe, ethical and effective practice” that NZAC (2008, clause 1.2) mandates for one-on-one supervision.

There is agreement in the literature that peers working in groups for supervision should not be beginner practitioners (H. Crago & Crago, 2002; Feltham & Dryden, 1994; Izzard, 2001). There seems to be an assumption that beginner or trainee counsellors need to be shaped into their professional practice by challenges from supervisors, and that beginners or trainee counsellors in peer groups might not be able to provide this (Feltham & Dryden, 1994). There is also a developmental view of supervision which views supervision as a “component of training” (Goodyear & Bernard, 1998, p. 7). Indeed, in most parts of Europe and the United States, supervision is mandated only while the practitioner is in training, and for a provisional time post-training, unlike the United Kingdom (Bond, 2000) and Aotearoa New Zealand where supervision is mandated throughout a counsellor’s career (NZAC, 2008). However, “experienced

supervisors may often be distant in their own practice from the kinds of issues being faced by beginners, who may be helped better by colleagues only slightly senior to themselves” (Feltham & Dryden, 1994, p. 17).

There is also general agreement in the literature that peers in supervision do not evaluate each other’s work (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996; Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; M. Carroll, 1996). At the same time, there is acknowledgement that peer supervision is particularly useful for practitioners in remote or rural areas where it may not be possible to engage a supervisor who shares the same counselling approach or paradigm as the practitioner (H. Crago & Crago, 2002; McNicoll, 2001).

Tuakana/Teina

At one point, as we reflected on our group’s history, Kandyce used the words tuakana/teina to describe the way we had mentored each other in the group. Tuakana/teina is a concept that has its origins in Māori culture. It is the name given to the teaching and learning relationship between an older sibling (tuakana) and a younger sibling (teina) of the same gender (Thomas & Davis, 2005). The purpose of such a relationship is for the tuakana to provide support and guidance while overseeing the teina’s development and learning (Eruera, 2004). The tuakana/teina relationship serves part of the wider purpose of whakawhanaungatanga (Royal Tanaere, 1997) which is the Māori word used to describe the continuous act of developing relationships (H. Elder, 2010). From a Western view, this appears to be a hierarchical relationship, however it “is balanced with a strong principle of reciprocity” (Eruera, 2004, p. 62). This may seem like a contradiction in terms, but in the Māori world a tuakana/teina relationship is recognised as arising from the principle of ako which means to learn as well as teach. There does not seem to be an equivalent word in English. Perhaps the lack of a word in English to describe a non-hierarchical teaching and learning relationship reflects pre-modern Western philosophical ideas about every person having a place and status within some kind of “cosmological order” (May, 2005, p. 5).

Summary

The work of this chapter has been to review the literature around communities of practice, professional identity, and peer groups. Most of the ideas

presented here offered me ways to conceptualise what we did in our group, although there are gaps in each of the conceptualisations. Most notably, group work outside peer supervision does not pay attention to the need for ethical issues to be considered. As counsellors, we had a professional duty of care towards the people we worked with. Concepts of peer supervision do include attention to ethical issues, but the well-rehearsed ideas about peers being experienced practitioners do not line up well with our work as Master of Counselling students supporting each other's learning and professional practice.

Chapter Three – Method

Introduction

This chapter reports the practical steps I took to prepare for and carry out this research project. I outline the qualitative research methods I used. I discuss the particular ethical issues that we faced and addressed. I outline the research process itself. While Kandyce, Nicola and I worked together to determine and action many of the steps we took, the responsibility for this project rests with me.

We responded to the research question of how and what our peer professional learning group had contributed to our professional identities and counselling practices, as practitioners investigating our own practices. I wove together strands of co-operative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, narrative inquiry and participatory action research (see below) to form a bricolage. In this way I tailored the method to match my intentions. I wanted to show the relationship between what we did and how we worked, and the contexts from which those actions arose. My understanding was that a bricolage would encourage me to make these connections (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008).

To analyse the data we produced, I called on the narrative therapy inquiry skills that I use every day in my counselling practice. These skills included outsider witnessing, relative influence questioning and discourse deconstruction, also discussed below.

Preparing for this project

I first set out the steps of the project, to give the reader a chronological overview:

1. Kathie wrote to the Chairperson of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee to advise the Committee of my intention to consult with Kandyce and Nicola about the focus and process for this project. She noted that she would oversee this preparatory process. In order to take seriously the power relations between our group members, I could not proceed with an application for ethical approval independently of our group.
2. Nicola, Kandyce and I met twice specifically to discuss this research project. We decided on a focus for the research, from which we formulated

the research question. We co-authored the participant consent forms (see Appendix) and Kandyce and Nicola signed them. We determined how we would generate the data and set the date for doing this.

3. I submitted an application for ethical approval and the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee gave approval.
4. Kandyce, Nicola and I met again to discuss our concern about one of the methods we had elected to use to collect the data. We decided to change this as we wanted to use a method that was more in line with the way we had conducted our professional practice together in the past.
5. I submitted an appendix to my ethics application to the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and this, too, was accepted.
6. Nicola, Kandyce and I met to generate the data for the project. This took the form of a conversation over the course of a morning to respond to the research question. I recorded the conversation on two audio recording devices.
7. I transcribed the conversation, e-mailing copies to Kandyce and Nicola. We had agreed that they would take this opportunity to edit the transcript if necessary. I collated the changes and uploaded a copy of it onto Moodle for Kathie.
8. I wrote Chapters Four, Five and Six of this thesis, and sent copies to Nicola and Kandyce. In these chapters I had placed questions in text boxes for them to respond to during our final research conversation.
9. Kandyce, Nicola and I met for two hours to respond to the questions in the text boxes and to discuss which stories I had chosen to tell and how I had told them. I invited them to make suggestions and edit my work.
10. I transcribed this conversation.
11. I wrote up the discussions of the questions in the text boxes. Over the course of the following two weeks I spoke with, and corresponded by e-mail with, Nicola and Kandyce to fine-tune the stories until we were all satisfied with what I had written.

Bricolage

The methods we decided on for this project were chosen in response to wanting to work congruently with our professional practices as narrative therapists. We were interested in privileging our “local knowledge” (Geertz,

1983), showing ourselves to be situated within our social locations and personal histories (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008), and paying attention to power relationships. This suggested the creation of a bricolage (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). Originally, the French word *bricoleur* (a noun) referred to a widely-skilled artisan who used tools that were at hand to undertake a project (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Today in France, *bricoleur* has come to denote the person who engages in DIY (do-it-yourself) projects, with the word *bricolage* describing the carrying out of the project (M. Solier, personal communication, July 7, 2011). Currently, in relation to research, the meaning of *bricoleur* has broadened to denote a researcher who stitches together “different voices, different perspectives, points of views, angles of vision”, and different methods, the way a quilter stitches fabrics together to create a montage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 7).

My bricolage, described below, comprises elements of co-operative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, narrative inquiry, and narrative therapy practices. This bricolage has the flavour of participatory action research. The background to the bricolage, the underside of the quilt, the part that all the colours of the woven complexities of the front design sit upon, comprises concepts from a postmodern, post-structuralist, social constructionist paradigm (see the theoretical location of this study discussion in Chapter One). I look briefly at the research practices that have formed part of the design of this thesis below.

Co-operative inquiry

Heron (1996, p. 1) defined co-operative inquiry as “two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it.” The method we followed to produce this research reflects this process, although we restricted ourselves to only two cycles. However, the purpose of co-operative inquiry differs from the purpose of this research project. The purpose of co-operative inquiry is to solve problems. The purpose of this project was to offer stories about how Kandyce, Nicola and I worked in our peer professional learning group to shape our professional identities and counselling practices in the hope that these stories will be useful to others and ourselves. What we offer here are stories of how we had already solved the problems that beset us (such as finding ways to produce learning outside of discourses of personal failure and competition).

As well as solving problems, co-operative inquiry is used to generate knowledge that can be owned by participants, and that is useful to them (M. Baldwin, 2006). Participants can own the knowledge that they generate because they have taken part in its creation, and they are not separated from their knowing of it by having an outside researcher put another interpretation on it. Finding a way to make our research useful to all of us was important to me because I had some understanding of the pain visited on Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand by the offensive research practices of the colonisers (Smith, 1999). Working co-operatively, and showing that collaboration here, was an acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the participants.

Co-operative inquiry incorporates the concept of researching with, rather than on, people (Reason, 1994). To view researchers and participants as one and the same requires a grasp of social constructionist ideas that conceptualise the co-creation of reality in relationship (Burr, 2003). There are no ‘facts’, but only perceptions of the world from one viewpoint or another (Burr, 2003). “It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated” (Burr, 2003, p. 4). Using co-operative inquiry processes, Kandyce, Nicola and I worked together in determining the focus of this research project, what questions we might respond to in keeping with that focus, and what action we would take to further the inquiry.

Appreciative inquiry

The purpose of this research project, as I have written above, was to show how and what Nicola, Kandyce and I, within the context of our peer professional learning group, had done that was useful in the co-construction of our professional identities and counselling practices. In our research conversations, we intentionally co-authored stories of appreciation. By telling stories of appreciation, we were following the practices of appreciative inquiry which seeks to explore what has been possible for people, rather than focus on their problems and look for ways to solve them (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001). I think, however, that appreciation may only be possible when there is some awareness of the difficulties that produced it. I believe that it was important for me to also write of our difficulties to give the readers of this thesis an appreciation of what we had achieved.

I would make a link here between appreciative inquiry and narrative therapy counselling practices. Modernist approaches to counselling often have people's problems as their focus. This focus can marginalise other storylines which contain narratives of times in people's lives when they have addressed these problems, resisted these problems, and, at times, overcome these problems (White, 2007). Narrative therapists work to redevelop these marginalised storylines so that the storylines can provide "people with a foundation to proceed to address their predicaments and problems in ways that are in harmony with the precious themes of their lives" (White, 2007, p. 128). The link I would make here is that appreciative inquiry also seeks to be generative and constructive rather than reproduce research practices which hold their focus on problems (Ludema et al., 2001).

The reason I wrote above that there are only elements of appreciative inquiry in this bricolage is because appreciative inquiry is usually used to research ways to promote change within organisations (Ludema et al., 2001). This research project is not connected to any organisation but to our small, ad hoc group. Appreciative inquiry has four phases to guide researchers, but these were not what we decided to use for this research. Nonetheless, an appreciative ethos pervaded this investigation.

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry has been defined by Chase (2005, p. 641) as "an amalgam of interdisciplinary lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars narrated by the one who lives them." The narrators are centered in the research, and their meanings are privileged over the researcher's interpretations (Webber, 2008). A narrative approach to counselling practice also pays attention to who might have the authority to interpret meanings and experiences. Narrative counsellors prefer to offer clients "genuine agency" (Winslade, Crocket, & Monk, 1997, p. 56) in the therapy relationship so that the power relations that otherwise might be shaping their lives are not reproduced (White, 1997). Narrative therapists take up positions that are "decentred and influential" (White, 2005, p. 9). This positioning holds clients' experiences and meanings centred in the work. Narrative therapists choose to privilege clients'

meanings, as we understand that “meaning is not an essential property of words” (Clarke, 2008, p. 23) but rather something that is performed (Gergen, 2009b).

My understanding about how meaning is produced informed one of the actions I took to keep Kandyce and Nicola centred in this research project. As a dialogic practice, I posed questions to them which I put in text boxes while I was writing this thesis. I took these questions back to them in our final research conversation in order to invite a richer storying of their meanings (see Chapter Four). This practice kept them close as I was writing. They were my “internalized community” (MacCormack & Tomm, 2001, p. 305). Having them close, and knowing that they would read and edit the stories I had composed, helped me remember that these stories were not mine alone to tell or make meaning of.

Participatory action research

I write of this research project having the flavour of participatory action research (PAR) because PAR has a secondary purpose of generating knowledge collectively (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). However its method, a circular process of “action-reflection-action over time” (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001, p. 76) is not closely followed here. Like co-operative inquiry, PAR has problem-solving as its primary focus (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Nonetheless, its emphasis on *participation*, in researching *alongside* rather than *on*, captures the spirit of this research.

Methods for analysing the data

Outsider witnessing

The narrative therapy practice of outsider witnessing is used to provide a “definitional ceremony” in which client’s performances of their stories are witnessed by one or more persons other than the therapist (White, 2007). There are three stages to the practice:

1. The telling of the significant life story by the person for whom the definitional ceremony is for.
2. The retelling of the story by the people invited to be outsider witnesses.
3. The retelling of the outsider witnesses’ retelling, which is done by the person for whom the definitional ceremony is for. (White, 2007, p. 185)

One of the purposes of this practice is to create a forum for the authentication and amplification of people's local knowledge and identity claims (White, 2007). When analysing the data for this thesis, I found myself in the position of retelling the stories of our group. When we met to discuss the way I had re-storied our stories, there was a retelling of these stories, just as there is in outsider witnessing practice. I believe that the writing of this thesis from the telling and retelling of our stories provides authentication and amplification of our group's knowledge and identity claims.

Relative influence questions

One of the questions Michael White (2002) suggested therapists ask their clients in the context of experiences of personal inadequacy is what they feel inadequate in relation to. This question seeks to show that problems are not always influencing people, and do not hold sway over every aspect of their lives (Payne, 2006). I asked this "relative influence" question (White, 1989, p. 88) of the transcript as I looked through it for examples of the effects of discourses of personal failure. In keeping with way narrative therapists use relative influence questions, I mined the transcript for stories of the effects on our group of these discourses of personal failure, and then mapped the considerable influence we had on the effects of these discourses.

Discourse deconstruction

The purpose of discourse deconstruction as a narrative therapy practice is to "invite people to see their stories from different perspectives, to notice how they are constructed (or *that* they are constructed), to note their limits, and to discover that there are other possible narratives" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 57). Deconstruction provides a way of unpacking taken for granted ideas which are thought of as truths because they have become "split off from the conditions and the context of their production" (White, 1992, p. 121).

Narrative therapists ask specific questions to help deconstruct discourses, and these are the sort of questions I asked myself as I analysed the data for this thesis. To deconstruct discourses, Freedman and Combs (1996, p. 121) suggested we ask the following:

1. the *history of a person's relationship* with the belief, practice, feeling, or attitude,

2. *contextual influences* on the belief, practice, feeling, or attitude,
3. the *effects or results* of the belief, practice, feeling, or attitude,
4. the *interrelationship* with other beliefs, practices, feelings, or attitudes, and
5. the *tactics or strategies* of the belief, practice, feeling, or attitude.

These questions guided my analysis of the data.

Ethics

In this section I outline the main ethical considerations for this research project. Ethical approval was applied for and granted by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee on June 1, 2011.

Consent

Since we had collaborated on choosing the focus for the research, as well as the method, and had composed the consent form together, Nicola and Kandyce were well-informed about what was being asked of them as participants in this research project. We spent considerable time discussing and writing the participant consent form so that the concerns we each held were addressed. We were concerned about issues of vulnerability (see Cornforth, 2011) that might arise from the stories we produced. During our conversations we agreed that if such issues arose, we would consult with each other at the time, or outside our meetings if necessary. Before we met for the purposes of generating data for this project, there had been times when a group member had left with a sense of pain at the end of a meeting and we always had a commitment to somehow speak that and put it right. So we were familiar with the risk of vulnerability, but previously it was only in the context of the group. Now, in the context of the research, we agreed that matters of vulnerability could be addressed the way we had always addressed them – by speaking them and putting them right.

Confidentiality

Kandyce and Nicola decided not to protect their identities through anonymity. We knew that they would be readily identifiable to people who knew any one of us. We discussed the risks to them of being named. Their chief concern was that while the ideas they held would change over time, what was recorded in the written thesis would endure unchanged. However, I assured them that I would write in this thesis that the snippets of transcript that I included should not be

“read as accurate reflections of lived experience” (Bird, 2000, p. 1), but rather as versions of perceptions of experience, chosen from the multiple stories that could be told of those perceptions of experiences. As well, knowing that they could read through the transcripts and change their words if they wanted to gave them some sense of agency in the research process.

Part of the work we have done, and continue to do, is consultation about the clients we work with in our counselling practices. However, I have kept the focus of this research story on our experiences within the group, rather than on client work. In this way, I have protected client confidentiality.

Risk of harm

One risk was that by participating in this research, the relationships between Nicola, Kandyce and me would change in a harmful way. We would no longer be just group members. We would be colleagues who had collaborated in a research project. However, we found that storying what and how our work had contributed to our professional identities and counselling practices worked to perform further friendship and trust between us.

I have written below about the narrative document I prepared after our first research conversation which described the spirit of our group and the values that we stand for. We decided that we would refer back to this document if the goodwill between us was threatened. I arranged for us to be able to consult with Kathie for help in resolving difficulties if necessary. Since Kathie had worked with all of us as lecturer and supervisor, we all felt we would be comfortable asking for her help.

In 2011 when this research project was undertaken, Nicola was still a student at the University of Waikato in the MCouns. programme. The teacher for her paper HDCO542 Counselling Practicum was Kathie, and Kathie was also her programme supervisor. Since Kathie would be marking and grading her work, as well as supervising this thesis, there was the potential for Nicola to be poorly positioned to complain if there were either difficulties with this research project or her university work. To address this complexity, Kathie arranged for Associate Professor Wendy Drewery of the Department of Human Development and Counselling to be available for Nicola to speak with, if necessary.

We did not foresee how knowing Kathie would listen to our research conversation would affect our behaviour in that conversation. Despite our careful discussion in the first meeting when we tried to anticipate what Kathie's listening might constrain, we were all more nervous than we expected. The research positioned us differently as a group. As a research group we invited an external audience, but we only learnt about the effects of that audience as we were doing the research conversation. This awkwardness must have had some effects on the data. I remember Kandyce saying that she wanted us to represent ourselves well. However, there were places where we spoke willingly about the difficulties that beset us from time to time.

The research process

First meeting: Negotiating our research agenda and process

As well as continuing our regular meetings as a group, Kandyce, Nicola and I met twice to specifically discuss this research project.

In the first meeting, which lasted two hours, I invited Kandyce and Nicola to join with me in determining the focus of the research. I made an audio recording of the conversation. I located the impetus for this invitation in a Kaupapa Māori orientation which addresses the devolution of power in research processes (Bishop, 1996). I spoke about the Treaty of Waitangi and my determination to honour its principles in my work. I asked what they thought might constrain us from being able to speak or participate. We discussed what the impact of being participants in the research might be on our families because of the time commitment needed for our meetings. I asked them what cultural issues we needed to consider. I transcribed the conversation. From the transcript, I gathered our words together to tell a story about what we thought we stood for as a group. I sent this document in the form of a narrative letter to Nicola and Kandyce so that we could hold on to what we had articulated was important to us.

Second meeting: Checking with Nicola and Kandyce

In the second meeting, which was held two weeks later, I asked Kandyce and Nicola if the letter had captured their sense of what we stood for, inviting them to add or edit what I had written. We discussed how we might explore the focus we had decided on in the previous conversation. We also decided on a name

for our group: a peer professional learning group. Together we composed the participant consent form (see Appendix).

Third meeting: Revising our method

I arranged for Kandyce, Nicola and myself to have a third meeting to discuss our unease about the method we had decided to use for this research project. We felt we would prefer to use an unstructured collaborative group conversation to address the research question. We returned to this relatively unstructured process because this was how we had carried out our professional practice in our group in the past. It seemed more comfortable to all of us to be using this process rather than introducing a different practice or imposing a structure. I wrote a request for approval of further developments to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, and was granted this approval.

Fourth meeting: The main data-generating conversation

For our fourth meeting, the meeting when we would have the main data-generating conversation, we met for half a day. In this time we addressed our research question *How, and what, has this peer professional learning group contributed to its members' professional identity and counselling practice?* We had planned to focus on our practice in the past, and then our current practice, but these two timelines wove into each other as we spoke. We used our skills as narrative therapists to help each other explore and enrich the story of our group.

Transcribing

I transcribed this conversation from the audio recording myself as I knew I would need to become very familiar with its contents. I edited the transcript as I went, leaving out the interjections while keeping the words that conveyed the sense of the conversation. Transcripts cannot 'accurately' represent the complexities of conversations, and they should not be taken as the 'truth' of any matter (Bird, 2000). Indeed, as I have written in Chapter Four, I understood that the act of transcribing is itself an interpretation. I knew that Nicola and Kandyce would read the transcript and have the chance to make any changes they saw fit. After all, the data belonged to all of us. The onus of responsibility for the transcript's usefulness in representing our stories was shared, but not equally. I carried greatest responsibility as researcher. I e-mailed copies of the transcript to Kandyce and Nicola for editing. They made no amendments.

Data Analysis

... the interpreting involved consists of trying to rescue the “said” of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms. (Geertz, 1973, p. 20)

To analyse the data (the transcript), I began by collating groups of noticings, rescuing particular aspects of “the said” from the transcript of the wider conversations. For example, I picked out stories about discourses of personal failure, the practice of tuakana/teina, quitting stories, religious metaphors, what we did, and how we did it. I found I was in the odd position of being an “outsider witness” (White, 2007) to my own words, as well as Nicola and Kandyce’s. In this position, I could engage with the transcript in a way that reflected the narrative therapy practice of outsider witnessing (see p. 24). Taking up the position of an “outsider witness” provided me with opportunities to be reflexive as well as reflective.

Another odd position I found myself in was that of being both outside the group as the researcher, and inside the group as a group member. This created a tension for me because I had some knowledge of our group practices beyond what the data told me. The challenge for me was to hold the main research conversation at the centre of this research while working to disclose myself as the teller of the stories, particularly when I brought in my own knowing to fill gaps. This disclosure aligns with the narrative practice of therapists being transparent about our “culturally and socially formed assumptions, beliefs and behaviours” (Payne, 2006, p. 174). Being transparent promotes accountability and, in the context of my research, takes a stand against “the myth of silent authorship” (Speedy, 2008, p. 29).

Fifth meeting: Consulting about my analysis and responding to the questions that arose

Before our final meeting, I had written Chapters Four, Five and Six of this thesis. I e-mailed these chapters to Nicola and Kandyce. They read them, and e-mailed me some comments. We had a one hour meeting so that we could discuss the questions I had posed to them while writing. I recorded this conversation and transcribed it. I inserted into the text boxes their responses to the questions in the chapters. Over the following weeks Kandyce, Nicola and I e-mailed each other to fine-tune the stories until we were satisfied that they represented the stories we wanted to tell here.

Summary

This chapter shows how we prepared for this research project, always working as collaboratively as possible, given that it was my study, and it was shaped by my academic supervisor as well as by Nicola, Kandyce and me. I have written about the knitting together of co-operative inquiry, appreciative inquiry and narrative inquiry to create a bricolage. Through this knitted bricolage runs a thread of participatory action research. I have written of ethical issues that had the potential to influence this research project, and some that influenced it despite the work we did to pre-empt it. I have outlined the research process, highlighting some of the dilemmas I faced in the awkward positioning of being both researcher and participant.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six I present the stories of our group. I write of *how* we worked together, and *what* we did and, finally, I write of the implications of this work for our professional identities.

Chapter Four – Stories of *How We Worked Together*

And so many more stories, all changing by the minute, all swirling and braiding and weaving and spinning and stitching themselves one to another...and to stories that used to be here and still *are* here in ways that you can sense sometimes if you listen with your belly, and the first green shoots of stories that will be told in years to come ... stories ... leading to one another like spider strands or synapses or creeks that you could listen [to] patiently for a hundred years and never hardly catch more than shards and shreds of the incalculable ocean of stories...but you sure can *try* to catch a few, yes? (Doyle, 2010, p. 13)

I was aware, while exploring the words we had used to story how we worked together, that my ‘reading’ of the transcript would constitute an interpretation of our stories. My hope was to respect the effort my colleagues put into our storying by staying close to their intentions. Since the social constructionist perspective describes intentions as relational performances that are both performed and audienceed, (Gergen, 2009b), I wanted my representation to somehow be a dialogue. I understood that transcripts cannot ‘accurately’ represent the complexities of conversations, and that they should not be taken as the ‘truth’ of any matter (Bird, 2000). And I knew that my ideas about Kandyce and Nicola’s intentions were just that – my ideas.

These understandings created some tension for me. In order to marry their intentions with my ideas, I decided to take my representations back to Nicola and Kandyce, just as we do as part of narrative practice. I hoped that this “taking it back” practice (White, 1997, p. 132) would trouble (Davies, 1991) the taken-for-granted modernist discourses that position researchers (and counsellors) as experts and authorities whose pronouncements encapsulate the truth of a matter (White, 1997). While these modernist research practices appear to be “universal”, like many other taken-for-granted aspects of our lives, they “are the result of some very precise historical changes” (Foucault, cited in R. Martin, 1988, p. 11) .

As I wrote these next two chapters, to take the writing back to Kandyce and Nicola I created text boxes with questions I wanted to pose to them when we met for our final conversation for the project. I positioned these boxes in the text after knowledge claims I made that I felt needed their commentary. I decided, after we had met for that final conversation, that I would put their responses in the

same boxes. I did this, rather than present them in the final chapter, because I noticed that it was difficult for us to respond to the questions I had posed without reminding ourselves of the context from which they arose. I realised then that in order for these dialogues to make sense to you, the reader, the responses needed to be with the questions, which should stay in the context from which they arose. I also inserted snippets from e-mails sent to me by Nicola and Kandyce. These e-mails were important in shaping what I wrote so, in order to maintain transparency of method, I included them here.

I believe that overtly inviting Kandyce and Nicola into commentary in these text boxes troubled traditional research ideas about the separation of the researcher and the participants (Reason, 1994). Posing questions in text boxes kept Kandyce and Nicola by my side as I was writing. Kandyce and Nicola became my “internalized community” (MacCormack & Tomm, 2001, p. 305). As Nicola said in an e-mail to me, “remember that we are on the page with you” (N. Carroll, personal communication, May 18, 2011).

In this chapter I explore our accounts of some of the ways in which our peer professional learning group interacted. I explore our interactions to get some understanding of how we were able to set a climate in which we could contribute to the continuing construction of our professional identities and counselling practice.

Firstly, I set the stage by writing about discourses of personal failure and competition. I do this because one of the stories I want to tell here, in response to reading the transcripts, was that I consider some of our actions to be strategies. That is not to say that we intentionally employed them, but rather that these actions are strategies that showed themselves to have had particular effects. I believe that they are strategies that allow us “to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves” (Davies, 1991, p. 51). I am choosing to write these stories of resistance and subversion because I hope they might be useful to others.

Secondly, I show some of the actions we took to set a climate in which we could flourish, not only in the ordinary meetings of our peer group, but also as we reviewed and discussed our research question in our research meetings. I found that four actions had been particularly helpful in setting this climate: offering a “receiving context” (White, 1995, p. 208) before speaking; attending to how we speak to each other and how we speak about others; holding on to what Nicola

called “a spirit of learning”; and weaving playfulness in and out of our conversations. All four of these actions worked to help us have some agency when the positions offered by discourses of personal failure and competition were not aligned with our preferred ways of being.

Lastly, I write about the accounts we offered about how we held onto our intentions to work, rather than only socialise when we met. I write about our actions in this regard because we know that other groups of students have tried to set up groups like ours but have not managed to take their meetings past an informal social get-together. I put forward two points of difference that I suggest were critical to our group’s working ethos.

Discourses of personal failure

Michael White (2002) considered that discourses of personal failure are an expression of modern technologies of power. These discourses compel and encourage us to place our lives, and others’ lives, along continua of ‘normalcy’. We are to judge ourselves, and others, to be failures if our lives do not fall within the socially-constructed ideas of what is ‘normal’ that form the parameters of what is ‘acceptable’ on these continua. The “sad effects” (Winslade, 2009, p. 337) of these judgements include experiences of “degrees of inadequacy, abnormality, insufficiency, incompetency, hopelessness, ineffectualness, deficit, imperfection and worthlessness” (White, 2002, p. 43).

I do not want readers of this thesis to believe that discourses of personal failure were always influencing our group. What I found, when I asked “relative influence questions” (White, 1989, p. 88) (see p. 25) of the transcript, was that together we storied five areas into which discourses of personal failure intruded. I illustrate each of these areas briefly here:

1. Discourses of personal failure produced a sense of inadequacy when Nicola and Kandyce were in their practicum placements, they reported. Nicola spoke of these “sad effects” (Winslade, 2009, p. 337) when she told us about the difficulty in speaking across paradigms while in a placement where modernist practices prevailed and narrative therapy was unfamiliar: “I can just go into discourses of personal failure ... I’d go home and question what I was doing. Like ‘I just can’t get it’ and ‘how come I can’t formulate the words to have a professional voice?’” She described these

moments as “wobbly times” that brought with them feelings of being “quite alone, muddling around.” Kandyce had experienced “wobbly times” on placement too. She used the word “courage” to explain what she called on in order to hold on to her sense of adequacy in the face of a “professional sense of failure.” She said, “Sometimes it was so bad, I felt so really down about myself.”

2. Experiences of feeling ‘not good enough’ had threatened to overwhelm us at times when we were thinking of meeting each other to work in our peer professional learning group. Kandyce described these experiences as being produced by “ideas about success, and ideas of perfection, and doing [counselling practice] well, and doing it the best.” She told us, “At the beginning [before Nicola joined us] I was feeling very nervous. I remember meeting you [Zoë]. I felt ‘not good enough’ and all that sort of stuff.” I had also felt nervous at this time, and for the same reason. Discourses of personal failure also produced anxiety for all of us when Nicola joined us. Kandyce described it as “just nervousness.” Part of Nicola’s experience of anxiety was an expectation that she would be “ripped to bits and come back with nothing intact”, an experience she had had in several personal development groups.
3. We all spoke of having experienced anxiety about not reaching the standards set by the university for the Masters programme. Kandyce said, “I was thinking about the day I drove up to Waikato and ‘I’m going to do this programme’. So nervous ... I was a bit frightened I might fail.” I, also, was quite nervous that I would not be good enough to be successful at my studies. I used the word “courage” to describe to Kandyce and Nicola what it took to sustain me through the “hard work” of the programme.
4. I spoke of feeling overcome by discourses of personal failure during and after supervision when I was new to counselling, “I’d come back from my supervisor ... thinking ‘I’ve got to give it up. I’m clearly unable to do this work. I’m so useless’.” I understand, now, that there are modernist discourses which dominate supervision practice. These discourses position practitioners, particularly those whose professional identities as counsellors are thinly described, as “unknowing” (Crocket, 2002a, p. 19). My sense of nervousness when I thought about engaging in peer

supervision with Nicola and Kandyce was brought forward from these early experiences.

These discourses of personal failure were (and are) persistent: “[they do] intrude still at times, and I feel useless. It’s good to come here and we all put our shoulders to [pushing them out of our way]” (Zoë). We found that it was necessary to continue to work on the deconstruction of these discourses because of “the sheer complexity of discourse and discursive practice, and by the power of dominant discourses to reassert themselves” (Davies, 1998, p. 138). In working together in our group, we “put our weight behind” our preference to learn with and from each other, the “narrative alignment...*against* problems, against isolating, deficit-inducing discourses, and *for* [us]” (Winslade et al., 1997, p. 63) (emphasis in original).

Discourses of competition

According to Burr (2003, p. 33), discourses of competition are “fundamental” in a capitalist society which is “structured around individuals and organisations that compete with each other for jobs, markets, etc.” The centering of individuals “invites us into a posture of competition” (Gergen, 2009a, p. 86). In the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand, individual achievement and competitiveness have traditionally been highly valued (Hawken & Worrall, 2001; Jones, 1991). On the terms of these discourses, in order to achieve, in an increasingly credentialed world, individuals must pit themselves in competition against others (Bills, 2004). Since Kandyce, Nicola and I had all grown up in Aotearoa New Zealand, and had been through the education system here, we were all subject to being positioned as competitors on the Waikato programme. Nevertheless, we managed to find a way to “forge something new” (Davies, 1991, p. 51) in order to resist and refuse being positioned in this way. We took a stand against discourses of competition. I track the history of taking that stand here.

Our stand against the discourses of competition was aided by Kandyce’s experiences with a colleague in the cohort ahead of her on the programme, “Every time I went [to a block course] she would help me.” This Hamilton-based colleague extended hospitality to Kandyce not only by sharing her home when Kandyce attended block courses at the university, but also by sharing knowledge. Kandyce brought forward to me the idea of sharing knowledge:

Zoë: "...right from the start, you were so ready to share the Uni work, and that just smashed that [competition discourse] – bang – for me."

Nicola: "And then you did it for me."

Zoë: "I did it for you because Kandyce had done it for me."

Kandyce described competition discourses as "a sort of protectiveness about knowledge." To step outside these discourses requires trust – trust that the person with whom you are sharing knowledge will not take advantage of this hospitality to plagiarise your work. Referring to Derrida's ideas on hospitality, Brown et al. (2011) wrote that hosts necessarily place constraints on what is offered to guests in order that the integrity of what is offered be maintained. If one offers everything one has, there may not be enough left for oneself. Control over what is offered is the essence of hospitality (Brown et al., 2011). What Kandyce offered me and what I offered Nicola in turn was "...a little bit of awhi [support, comfort], that's all, and a little bit of guidance - 'take some quotes'. I mean, I got them from someone else, so, it saves you time" (Kandyce).

One of the ideas that backgrounded Kandyce's sharing of knowledge with us came from an understanding of the difficulty of managing time when studying while holding on to an ethic of care for our families:

Kandyce: .. my biggest thing would be that the sharing of knowledge with others trickles down to the people. Not down as in down in a hierarchy, but out towards people. But also your families are going to benefit because you've actually got more time. Because I was up at night until two in the morning feeling stressed, and I think if we pass on and share, we're actually helping people have more time with their families and their loved ones.

As well as this ethic of care for our families, we were all concerned simply to help each other through the programme. I believe that we saw our work together as multiple opportunities to learn from each other. Conceiving of our work together as multiple opportunities to learn gave us a place to stand in opposition to the notion fostered by ideas about competition and success, that this work (both in the group and outside it) might only offer multiple opportunities to fail.

Setting a climate for our group: Four actions we took

1. Setting a receiving context

One of the ways we found to put our shoulders to the work of resisting and refusing discourses of personal failure and competition was to “attend to the receiving context” (White, 1995, p. 208) of what we were about to say. The phrase “receiving context” was coined by Michael White (2004, p. 102), based on Gregory Bateson’s writing about discerning meaning. Bateson proposed that if the news we are about to impart is to be made sense of, and to be understood by others in the way we intend, then we must take the step of attempting to make other levels of meanings redundant (Bateson, 1972). I believe that what we were attempting to make redundant were “isolating, deficit-inducing discourses” (Winslade et al., 1997, p. 63), such as discourses of personal failure and competition.

Nicola, Kandyce and I had all experienced the setting of receiving contexts on the block courses we attended at the university. The first time I heard the phrase “receiving context”, I was sitting with Nicola in Elmarie Kotzé’s HDCO544 Discourse and Counselling Psychologies class as she prepared us to enter into dialogue with her¹. I believe that the modelling of this way of preparing us, along with the teaching of how that action was situated in theory, enabled us to take this practice up in our group. Just as we had learnt in the classroom, we set our receiving context, and then spoke into our group.

Nicola: ... you brought up as a group the discourses that can silence us. The competitive ones, the personal failure ones, and they’re out in the open first. We all know they’re there *and* now let’s try [to work together so that we can learn](emphasis spoken).

I believe that setting a receiving context, by bringing up the possibility that discourses of personal failure and competition might get in the way of our work together, had the effect of the three of us forming an alliance to stand with recognition of them and against them. Setting a receiving context provided a point from which we were ready to discern “news of difference” (Bateson, 1972, p. 460): that there was a different way to do power in a group. This way of doing

¹ This practice is described in Crocket, Kotzé and Flintoff (2007).

power did not rest on practices of shaming or competing with each other, but rather rested on an ethic of collaboration, sharing, and reciprocity.

2. Respectful speaking

It was already visible to me before I began this research that one of the critical steps of setting up a climate for our group was to speak respectfully to each other. When I think back to our early conversations, I remember how careful Kandyce and I were about this. Speaking respectfully was more than the practice of taking care around issues of confidentiality when speaking of clients (although that was part of it). Speaking respectfully was what I described as “a shared ethic of care” produced by our understanding that “relations are constructed in the language we habitually use to speak of [others]” (Winslade, K. Crocket, & Monk, 1997, p. 57).

I did not think to ask Kandyce and Nicola in our research conversation about our practice of speaking respectfully because it had simply become the way we behaved when we were together – a taken-for-granted practice. It was interesting, therefore, that Nicola brought up the topic, exposing the practice when she said “...we’re speaking of people and ourselves in a very different way.” Nicola had been reminded of it during a conversation with a fellow student when she was at the Summer School:

[The fellow student] said, ‘I’m astounded by the respectful way that everyone speaks to each other.’ And I thought ‘oh, my goodness, I was too when I first started.’ And I was really rapt to hear that it also just becomes more a way of living and that I’m not noticing it as much. But [the student] noticed it. And I thought it’s cool that I would just expect it to be like this now.

Nicola’s comment expressed a transition that Kandyce and I had also experienced. At the beginning of our Master of Counselling programme, the attention we were taught to pay to the words we use required not a small amount of effort (see Drewery, 2005). I spoke to Nicola and Kandyce about this: “... we’re keeping the discursive talk going, we’re always watching our language.” It was a relief to me that, as I practised more, that careful way of speaking became a little more how I did things, and a little less something that required my constant attention.

Nicola's words "more a way of living" echo an idea that many of us came to understand as we went through the programme at Waikato, that, as Michael White (1997) had suggested, narrative therapy is more than a set of skills that must be learnt. "Narrative practices ... are built more on entering into a philosophical position than on learning some techniques" (Winslade & Monk, 2000, p. 32). As I said to Kandyce and Nicola, my understanding is that "the theory is where we stand." Nicola agreed, "How do we embrace the commitment to narrative ideas without the theoretical understanding?" When we grasped the philosophies that underpinned narrative therapy, we found that the ways we viewed our lives, and therefore lived our lives, were changing. Weingarten (1998, p. 9) expressed what I believe we all felt about these changes when she wrote "I love that a postmodern narrative approach allows me to join the small and the ordinary with my dearest values and most stimulating intellectual ideas. For the joining, it has been a gift." What Nicola captured when she described our changes as "more a way of living" reflected a "migration of identity" (Crocket, 2004, p. 1) that we had experienced. As Kandyce said, "It's like a way of thinking ... that way of looking at the world, no matter what we do."

Nicola again brought up the subject of care in speaking when she spoke about her experience of coming into the group:

I noticed the way you [Kandyce and Zoë] talked to each other. The care in the conversations when I first met you both. Straight away I noticed that.

I couldn't sense anything that I would be concerned about. Straight away. And that doesn't happen just anywhere.

I agree with Nicola that even in professional situations "the care" does not "happen just anywhere." She went on to say, "... some courses you go to, or groups there will be some yuckiness going on. I have really not experienced that up [at the university]."

I would make the link, as Nicola does, between the respectful speaking that Kandyce and I were engaging in with the ways of using language that we had seen demonstrated to us by the staff on the programme. For example, I remember how the careful ways of speaking taken up by our lecturers contributed to what made it possible for me to present a recording of my work with a client to the class. I reported this experience to Kandyce and Nicola, "I knew everyone was

going to be respectful. And it meant that I could do it. It took the anxiety away ...”.

Nicola went on to say, “[The lecturers] don’t allow [disrespectful speaking] really. You just know there would not be the speaking of people like that. They would turn it into another conversation.” I had also witnessed, sitting in the same class as Nicola, our lecturers turning conversations shaped by the effects of “yuckiness” into other conversations. One example of this was when “yuckiness” was unintentionally invited in by a throwaway comment from a student. The lecturer asked a question to provide a scaffold (Crocket, Kotzé, et al., 2007) for learning. She opened space for an exploration of the person’s intentions, and the effects of the words (for example, the position calls) on the others in the class. In moments like these, we were helped to understand “why we should watch what we say” (Drewery, 2005, p. 305).

While researching the literature for this project, I read an article written by two of our lecturers and a Visiting Teaching Fellow (Gaddis, Kotzé, & Crocket, 2007). They wrote about how they strived to demonstrate the philosophical and theoretical ideologies that underpin a narrative approach in the way they taught us, the way they interacted with us, and the way they spoke to each other. In this article about navigating the effects of contemporary gender discourses, Gaddis, Kotzé and Crocket (2007) gave an example of the practice of turning a conversation in a class with student counsellors. They wrote of pausing a classroom conversation when patriarchal discourses called some of those present into uncomfortable positions. They invited the person, who without awareness had spoken from these discourses in ways that positioned others and himself poorly, to talk of his intentions, and then asked how the other students had construed the words (Gaddis et al., 2007). This pause and inquiry was necessary because discourses (whether we are aware of them or not) produce the words we use in our conversations, creating a disparity between our intentions and the words we use to convey these intentions (Bakhtin, 1981). By pausing and inquiring, the lecturers illustrated how to trouble discourses in a respectful way so that other ways of being in the world that do not reproduce the effects of these discourses might be possible.

We ourselves were not always successful in speaking in respectful ways. We acknowledged this in our research conversation. When we caught ourselves

speaking in ways that we felt were not congruent with the philosophies we had come to value, we would help each other to find ways to re-connect with those philosophies. Nicola said “... we don’t come here and have a bitch session. We might have a bit of an off-load about stuff and after we’ve done that we might look at it discursively” and “... we might have moments when we go, you know...but we generally bring it back pretty fast ... so we find another place to stand. We don’t leave on that sort of note that we might come in with.” Drawing on a personal communication with K. Crocket, Te Wiata (2006, p. 59) referred to these sorts of off-loaded comments as “bracketed conversations”. Bracketed conversations allowed us to speak in language that was immediately available to us. We understood that it was bracketed because we knew that we would “bring it back” to our preferred way of speaking as soon as we could find the words and ideas to support that preferred way of speaking.

What we discovered in the conversation for this project was that speaking respectfully had made it possible for Nicola to feel safe enough to become a member of the group, and continue working in the group:

Nicola: [It’s] probably my first experience of [comfortableness of being with other women in a group]. And I’ve got women friends but for two people who I have relatively not known when I came in, there wasn’t a whole lot of time needed to establish that friendship somehow. It’s quite different.

Kandyce: Did narrative speed-track things? Or something like that? What are you thinking?

Nicola: Mmm. Probably. It does, because we’re speaking of people and ourselves in a very different way, discursively, and it takes away any of the personal finger-pointing ... all that sort of stuff ... or yucky ways of talking about people that I might have experienced in other groups. And I don’t like that so I really like the way that we talk.

As I wrote above (p. 40), the first time she met Kandyce and me, Nicola reported that she had noticed the respectful way we spoke to each other. She told us that the effect of this noticing had her thinking “Oh yay! I’m not going to be ripped to bits and come back with nothing intact.” Nicola was speaking about the point at which she joined the group that Kandyce and I had already set up – what could be called the ‘forming’ part of the group process (Yalom & Leszcs, 2005). What is

“absent but implicit” (White, 2000, p. 153) in her words is that she had been checking us out to see if there was anything for her to be concerned about. She described the effects of noticing the care we took in our conversations as “a feeling of safety.” This was further storied as Nicola told us about what it was that had made it possible for her to play us the video she was about to show her classmates at the next block course. She spoke of knowing she could invite us to talk about the learning gaps because of “the care I knew you two would [take].” While I imagine any such group is likely to begin with an intention of care for its members, I think that what is particular here, is that social constructionist ideas about the constitutive effects of language and narrative practice gave us specific strategies with which to enact care.

K: I wonder if the care was always there, and as time went [on, and with] our education, [and] training, it grew, evolved? (Taken from Kandyce’s comments on the draft of this chapter, sent via e-mail to me on 16 November 2011, after our final meeting).

3. A “spirit of learning”

Another action we took to set a climate in which our group could flourish was to embrace a “spirit of learning” in our work together. We spoke of a “spirit of learning” when we met to discuss this research project for the first time. Nicola offered us the phrase as a way of thinking about where we might stand if we could step outside the discourses of personal failure and competition that we knew would otherwise creep into our thinking as we recorded the main conversation for the project.

Neither Nicola nor Kandyce spoke about the history of this “spirit of learning”, although I can trace one aspect of its history from two of Kandyce’s comments. Firstly she said that a “spirit of learning” has “that student sort of feel”, and then she said being “open to learning is huge in that whole programme.” These comments sent me in the direction of looking at practices we might have learnt from the university. I remembered that the outline for the Professional Practice of Counselling paper (HDCO545) listed some questions for students to put to themselves before presenting to the class a recording of our counselling with a client. These questions asked us to consider, on deconstructing

terms, what (discourses) might constrain us from learning from, and alongside, our peers and teachers. The questions set a receiving context “in order to grow and shape [students’] experiences of reflexive practice” (Crocket & Kotzé, 2011, p. 397). The questions were:

- What kind of discomfort might become present if I show my work to my peers and teachers?
- What effects does this kind of discomfort have on my intention to learn?
- What is my position on these effects on my learning?
- Why do I have this position on these effects?
- What is it that I value about learning that might leave me caring more about learning whatever discomfort might get produced? (Crocket, 2010, p. 9)

My experience was that responding to these questions offered me agency so that I was able to take up a position where I could hold on to a “spirit of learning”. Responding to these questions also scaffolded me into a way of working when I experienced myself as poorly positioned. I was able to bring this way of working, this skill of troubling discourses, to position myself to learn from our work in the group, instead of succumbing to feelings of personal inadequacy.

Z: Kandyce and Nicola, what do you make of my theorising of the history of a “spirit of learning”? Do you agree with my theorising, or have I missed something? Are there other things that contributed to our knowing that this was an important part of enabling us to work together?

N: I want to find out where this phrase [a spirit of learning] came from. I don’t want it to look like it was attributed to me. I think it came from Elmarie [Kotzé] (see my note at the end of this conversation).

K: Often people in the class said things like that – a spirit of learning. A lot of the ideas [that we speak of] come from the [MCouns.] programme [lecturers and readings].

[Another part of what a spirit of learning contributed to enabling us to work together was] safety – like our little pledge...[a spirit of learning] was something that would help us to feel that we could contribute *even* in the midst of making

mistakes (spoken emphasis).

Even more powerful for me was that thought...that there was a responsibility to you two, to the group...the idea that these are two people learning here, and “Get over [your nervousness]” and “Be strong and just [contribute to the conversation].”

And also the care. I’m sure that influences what we actually bring [and talk about in the group]...there are topics and discourses that I might not want to discuss... part of it is because I don’t want to hurt, and exclude.

(A long conversation about care ensued).

Z: So the spirit of learning didn’t quite go far enough? The discourses themselves are constraining what we’re able to do here. So despite doing what we could to make it possible for us to speak in this group, there are still things that we cannot speak about, and may never be able to speak about, and that’s okay? I understand now that part of that care is constraining what we say. Maybe this is part of the performance of trust that we are constantly performing this care for each other? That we can be vulnerable and know that we’ll be cared for? Thinking about positioning?

K: Mm. It is about positioning. And if we could say to each other in the future ... “I’m actually okay.” Or making places to say, “this actually hurts for me right now and I’m okay to sit with the hurt, and this is why.”

N: Yeah, because otherwise we might be being so careful, and as women we all do it very well – as therapists we’re going to do it even better probably - but a lot of time, and thinking’s going in to care.

Z: We can’t collude.

K: Yeah, that’s my concern – that we’re colluding with and replicating the discourses [that silence us from speaking about some topics].

Z: Then we’re back to Elmarie’s [Kotzé] idea that the way you speak about these things – that analogy that she gave us about the physiotherapist, where if you don’t push hard enough, there’s no change. If you push too hard the person pulls away. So it’s managing the difference that makes the difference [“What is too usual does not make a difference. What is too unusual also does not make a difference. What

is appropriately unusual makes a difference” (Andersen, 1995, p. 15)].

Note: During a telephone call to me on December 19, 2011, Nicola remembered that the idea of holding on to a spirit of learning came from reading Michael White’s (2007, p. 6) description of his practice as “an apprenticeship without end”.

4. Playfulness

During our research conversations there were a number of times when playfulness burst through. We noticed that playfulness was something which had often been possible for us. As Kandyce put it, “we can play.” This was an aspect of our practice that was visible to all of us as an important part of creating a climate in which we could thrive.

In the first conversation we had together, in the planning stages of this research project, we spoke of what we thought we stood for as a group. We had just been speaking of holding onto a “spirit of learning” when Nicola said, “playfulness ... is part of the spirit of learning. It would be an important part to be included ... I think it supports the learning.” When I asked, “How does it support the learning?” the following exchange took place:

Nicola: I think it blows apart the whole idea that all of this learning or study or seriousness ... the seriousness doesn’t have to be here.

Zoë: ... the playfulness helps us sit with the pressures of the seriousness of what we’re doing then? And also the gravity of what we’re doing, or the commitment to ...?

Nicola: ... your research ... seriousness - for me it would be more being thoughtful and reflective. So that, and playfulness, takes away the seriousness somehow.

Kandyce: Sort of responsibility/commitment for me as well ... Commitment to your project and to our space together. Something like that. To the research.

I think that here we were referring to the pressures of “isolating, deficit-inducing discourses” (Winslade et al., 1997, p. 63) and our wish to go beyond their terms. This would be possible, Nicola implied, if we recognised that the pressures are

produced by a discourse that conflates study and learning with seriousness. Our playfulness kept this discourse exposed.

I looked through the transcripts of our conversations to see what forms the playfulness took. I wanted to see if it was possible to describe this playfulness here, and speak of its effects. Some of the playfulness was not visible in the transcript because at times its actions did not rely on words. It was happening before and after we started recording our conversations or was woven in between our words. I looked at places where I had written that we were all laughing to see what was producing that laughter. The four incidences I found were the following:

1. We purposefully used the words of modernist discourses to position ourselves more agentically,
2. We used ironic humour to navigate some uneven terrain,
3. Kandyce spoke of using “cheeky body language” which I came to understand as another way we mitigated the effects of discourses of personal failure, and
4. We scaffolded each other into alternative discourses.

I discuss each of these incidences below.

1. The use of modernist language: We used language that we understood to be produced by modernist discourses, for example those ideas produced by psychological discourses that have us measuring ourselves (see Rose, 1998), to make each other laugh. I found a place in the transcript where Kandyce had spoken of how she had felt when driving to meet me for the first time, “At the beginning I was feeling very nervous ... I remember meeting you. I felt like ... all that ‘not good enough’ and all that sort of stuff. And I’m okay now. I’ll never be good enough, but that’s okay!” We all laughed at this. It is an example of the use of irony where the apparent meaning of what was said (“I’ll never be good enough”) actually means something else (Fairclough, 1992). What is “absent but implicit” (White, 2000, p. 153) in her words is ‘I don’t have to worry about being good enough as long as I think about this from a postmodern standpoint’.

Kandyce’s words echoed the utterances of many of our earlier conversations when we had challenged our positionings in the discourses that produced our experiences of feeling ‘not good enough’. Our shared laughter illustrates, I think, our shared understandings about discourses of personal failure. The response of our laughter was also elicited by the laughter in Kandyce’s tone

of voice and the twinkle in her eyes as she spoke. This sort of non-verbal cueing is important for the interpretation of meaning, and is something that cannot be captured by the transcript (Kvale, 1996; Norrick, 2004). Our laughter was elicited by these cues, and, at the same time, depended upon our recognition of her intended meaning (Fairclough, 1992). I suspect that humour like this seeks to find and perhaps consolidate some common ground between us.

I believe that using discourses in a humorous way was a way of taking an agentic stand in order to subvert discourses produced by modern technologies of power (White, 2002) that might constrain our opportunities to learn from each other, or position us poorly in our lives. Being aware of these discourses did not mean that we could escape their effects; “Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognise that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted” (Davies, 1991, p. 51). We were subject to the effects of discourses about being good enough students, good enough practitioners, good enough to meet our group’s norms, good enough to have our work together researched, good enough as women, as partners, as wives, as mothers, and as daughters. However, we were able to use humour to position each other more agentially. In this way we were able to mitigate the effects of those discourses of personal failure so that we could hold on to a “spirit of learning” and make the most of our work together.

Z: Kandyce, what enabled you to speak about that nervousness in our conversation for this research? Was it something about the work we’ve done together? The way we’ve consistently chipped away at the discourses of personal failure together? Something else? Does it say something about trust? How has trust changed over time so that you can reflect back on that time in front of us and acknowledge that experience?

K: I would have been okay to share nervousness before. [However, having said that, I realise now that] I wouldn’t have shared it [in that first meeting] because I wouldn’t want to position you.

Z: And somehow that’s changed so that when we had that last conversation you could speak of it?

K: Yeah. I think it takes time so that I could actually say that. If I had said it to you [at

that first meeting], that I was nervous, then that might not have been good for you.

2. *The use of ironic humour*: We used ironic humour to navigate some uneven terrain. I have used the word ‘navigate’ here because I can see from the example I use in this section that Nicola and Kandyce’s performance of humour was co-constructed (Kotthoff, 2009), following a path that unfolded as it was constructed. Based on Wittgenstein’s ideas about “the relational nature of our deeds and social practices”, Shotter (1996, p. 8) used the word ‘navigate’ to describe this sort of performance:

... in joint action, instead of our existing monologically as already fixed subjectivities stating and fixing the objective content of our utterances, we have between us to ‘dance’ or to ‘navigate’ towards the common point of our dialogue and toward our ‘positions’ in relation to it and each other.

This is what was performed: in one of the conversations for this project, Nicola brought up the issue of the pressure Kandyce and I put on her to practise narrative interviewing from the moment she joined the group, although she was not then enrolled in the Counselling Skills paper, HDCO541.

Nicola: I remember practising those skills and I hadn’t even done [HDCO]541 then ... and you guys were [practising interviewing each other]. I was thinking “Oh God! I haven’t even practised this and now I’m doing it!” I was ready to run out the door a couple of times, and then I thought, “Nah, just get over it.”

Kandyce (laughing): We were mean on you!

Nicola (also laughing): You probably need to [at least] be doing a paper!

Kandyce: Or know the topic of the paper. (General laughter)

I believe that this exchange arose in response to the requirement that Kandyce and I placed on Nicola to be an equal member of the group despite being a new member, and being differently positioned in knowledge terms having begun her study later than us. Bringing the subject up was bumpy terrain because of Nicola’s implied criticism. I wonder if Nicola had some experience with using humorous self-deprecation as an acceptable way to broach the topic of an incident that was painful for her. Perhaps the humour made it easier to speak of this? Perhaps it was

a way of demonstrating to us that the anxiety produced by the pressure we put on her was no longer in charge. If her intent was to defuse the tension this topic might reasonably be expected to have brought, then her humour was successful (Witkin, 1999). If Nicola's intention was to defuse the tension that arose from this topic, then her intention must also have been to avoid damaging our relationships (Dews, Kaplan, & Winner, 2007). In this it was also successful.

I think that the efficacy of Nicola's hyperbole - "I was ready to run out the door a couple of times" - depended upon her words being interpreted in the way she meant (Fairclough, 1992). That Kandyce immediately responded with hyperbole herself was an indication that she understood this ironic intent - of course it was never our intention to be "mean". Nicola followed up with an understatement, and that too was ironic because in those early days of our work together, she *had* managed to interview both Kandyce and me using narrative questioning skills, despite not having done a practicum paper. Again, Kandyce's response mirrored Nicola's with another ironic understatement. This dancing and navigating towards the "common point" (Shotter, 1996, p. 8) of shared laughter clearly illustrates the performance of co-constructed actions that worked to mute the criticism while at the same time speaking of it.

One of the understandings that enabled us to interpret Nicola's words was produced by our shared experience of the difficulty of practising counselling skills in front of our colleagues and teachers in class. As Kandyce said, "... we all felt like that [in class] didn't we? We were all feeling on edge and nervous." Discourses of personal failure were readily available to us. My own experience of the effects of these discourses was that the nervousness they produced made it extremely difficult to think of the words to frame the questions to ask my client-colleagues, particularly the first time I tried in class. My experience of scrambling to find the words in class was what made me more determined to practice at home in our group. I said, "... *because* it's so difficult that's why I want to [practise] it [here]" (emphasis spoken). However, looking at Nicola's words above, it is clear that she had not been positioned well by my determination, even though she went on to say "... but [the difficulty of it] didn't stop me or put me off doing it. I knew it was going to be hard."

K: (Taken from an e-mail sent by Kandyce) I remember the feeling of wanting to create an inclusive space [for Nicola]...that of pulling her "up" [in terms
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of knowledge and practice] with us.

[Comment: I believe this is an acknowledgement of the hierarchy (in terms of knowledge) in the group, as well as Kandyce's intention to flatten that hierarchy (Freedman & Combs, 1996) by opening space for Nicola to be included.]

I wrote above about the requirement that Kandyce and I placed on Nicola to be an equal member of the group (practising narrative counselling skills) despite being differently positioned in knowledge terms. Kandyce and I had already been meeting to support each other in our studies and counselling practice for just over a year when we invited Nicola to join us. I would not consider the pairing of Kandyce and myself to meet the criteria for 'a group'. However, when Nicola joined us I would say that we became a group. We storied Nicola's joining us for the first time when we met to have the conversation for this project.

The story began when Kandyce spoke of there being "... a lot of 'give' in the group - literally, and in terms of time." She was referring to our practice of being flexible in our time-keeping if one of us brought a pressing concern. Nicola's response was to ask what it had been like for us to have her join us. I would make a link here between Kandyce's conception of the group having "a lot of 'give'" and Nicola's response. I think Nicola had some knowing about Kandyce and myself needing to have 'give' in order to extend hospitality to her, an 'outsider'. She said, "you [Kandyce] didn't know me ... so you had to have faith in Zoë's inviting me in" and "I was a bit of an unknown for both [of you]." While there was enough "give" for us to invite her in, there were conditions attached to that hospitality:

... for hospitality to be 'hospitality' it must contain within itself the irreducible possibility of hostility (hospitality and hostility share the same etymological root) - without a boundary (and the possibility to enforce it) letting the total outsider *in* 'as a friend' would not make sense. In hospitality there is a paradox, the unconditional is always already conditional. (Introna & Brigham, 2008, p. 14) (emphasis in original)

Nicola captured *the unconditional being always already conditional* when she said, "[being on the Waikato programme is] a ticket in the door [to being a

member of this group]. It doesn't mean you get a recurring ticket, but you get a first one." The "door" was open because of the "give", and the recurring ticket was conditional upon meeting the requirements of the group. In our group the requirements were that we would do more than meet for a social chat. We had our other friends for that. In our group we met in order to work together on our course work, talk about theory, practise narrative counselling skills, and offer each other a form of peer supervision. Nicola said, "You said right at the start that you'd mentioned other groups who found it difficult [to move from socialising to counselling practice] ... [but] this is what we do."

Group theory posits that in the initial stages of forming a group there is a period of tension when members are uncertain of what their role in the group might be (Forsyth, 1999). However if two members of the group have already formed an alliance, and worked together, as Kandyce and I had done, any person coming in might be expected to experience pressure to conform to what has already been established (Forsyth, 1999). Wherever there is pressure, there is always resistance to that pressure (Wade, 1997). I believe that Nicola's resistance to the pressure we exerted on her was expressed, creatively and playfully, in her words above, as she retold the story of her early experiences in our group.

Z: Nicola, what enabled you to speak about that early experience in our conversation for this research? What does this speak of? Has trust changed over time so that you can now, in front of us, reflect back on that time and acknowledge that experience? What do you make of my theorising of how you were inducted as a member of the group? How well does this capture your experience? Have I missed something?

N: It wasn't too big a deal to mention [my early experience in our research conversation].

Z: Does it depend on what the focus of what we're doing is, to what we talk about and, because [talking about working together] was the focus, that's why you brought it up?

N: Yeah, [but in any case] I would have felt comfortable [in bringing it up before now].

3. *Managing discourses*: We used playfulness in our interactions to resist and reject the positioning offered by discourses of personal failure. I knew (although it is not visible in the transcripts) that playful body language (gestures and facial expressions) had been very much present during our conversations for this project. I believe that this sort of playfulness had real effects in its support of our intentions to work against the “sad effects” (Winslade, 2009, p. 337) of, for example, pressures to be ‘good’ group members. I explore below those real effects, and how the playfulness produced them.

Kandyce brought our attention to this sort of playfulness during our research conversation when we were discussing the disadvantages of using Skype (a video communication computer application) compared to meeting face-to-face. During the discussion Kandyce said, “You miss all the cheeky body language that goes on.”

We were living in the geographically-isolated community of Gisborne. For each of us at one time or another, e-communication provided links to supervisors beyond Gisborne. However, as wonderful as these supervisors were, our sessions with them were hampered by the limitations of the slow speed of the broadband connections. For example, the calls were plagued by broken up, pixelated video imaging, with the image not synchronised to the audio most of the time. I spoke about another of the limitations that came with using webcams: “... half the body’s chopped off.” The limitations of the connection and the webcam meant that we often missed, in our conversations with our distant supervisors, the non-verbal cues that characterised our face-to-face conversations. Since “the spoken language is but one component of a full social performance” (Gergen, 2009b, p. 73), we were only able to audience some of what was being performed. The limitations of Skype are also echoed in this research, because I am unable to convey here the numerous non-verbal cues that were a part of our research conversations. I regret that you, the reader, are only able to be audience to an incomplete performance. The non-verbal cues in our conversations were important in their production of meaning as they interwove with the words we used (Crocket, 2001b).

Kandyce spoke of the body language being “cheeky”. I understand this to mean that it poked fun at something, teasing it. The word ‘tease’ comes from

Middle English and its early meaning was to “pull about ... to card wool” (Skeat, 1993, p. 516). This etymology suggests a gentle action, a getting rid of the knots rather than a ripping apart (J. Darkin, personal communication, October 22, 2011). However, teasing can also be hostile. It can be a way of adjusting the positions from which we exercise power (D. Craddock, personal communication, October 22, 2011). The difference between gentleness and hostility, and all the shades in-between them, depends on the relational context of the utterances (Kotthoff, 2007). “On this level, it is decided whether the irony is more supportive/friendly or competitive/aggressive” (Kotthoff, 2007, p. 403). It was my experience that our cheekiness was supportive, friendly and gentle.

What I realised, as I looked carefully at Kandyce’s words, was that the target of this gentle teasing was not each other. The target was the nervousness that came with our attempts to position ourselves as “good” researchers and participants for this project. I noted in the Method section the way multiple relationships between Kathie and the three of us positioned us to “behave well” as researchers and participants. What we did not foresee when I wrote the Ethics Application for this research was that our visibility to Kathie would have effects on our behaviour during the recording of the research conversations. Our visibility to Kathie (in terms of her reading of the transcripts of our conversations) contributed to creating a difference between our usual conversations and the conversations for this research. Kandyce spoke of this difference:

There is a distinct difference ... before, we were together for the course. But for me now, we are together for the course, but we are [also] here for your research, our research ... and Kathie is with us. It’s almost like she’s here. Because this is going to keep being reflected back there ... and we have to think about that recording right now.

When I asked Kandyce how she thought the difference would change the way we worked together, she replied, “I don’t really know how. I guess it’s something to think about. It shapes it differently I think. I’m not quite sure how it does, but I know it does.” Nicola spoke about how our visibility to Kathie “might [also] make it a bit more okay ... because I know that she’d hold everyone quite well.” These uncertainties produced some nervousness.

Z: Kandyce, in hindsight, can you see how our visibility to Kathie shaped our

conversations? Nicola, did you notice the effects of Kathie holding us? What were they?

K: I think that when we were recording [the research conversation, our visibility to Kathie] brought us back to narrative – kept us on track to narrative.

Z: So more careful about how we spoke? Not so much respectfully, but that we spoke in postmodern terms?

K: It's like, imagine if we were to have, say, someone like Oprah Winfrey witnessing us, someone we might have a bit of respect for. That they're sitting there watching us. I mean, it would shape our talk.

Z: So the audience is part of the performance, isn't it? Because it becomes a performance for that particular audience.

K: Yes. And as well as that, what we're saying once again, there are discourses. We've got [Kathie] there now. It's not just thinking about Nic and [the things that we need to navigate with care when we speak with her]. It's not [only] thinking about Zoë and [the things we need to navigate with her]. And now we've actually got not only Kathie, but the whole [Waikato counsellor education] team there.

Z: This is care, and mindfulness to the greater audience, which of course shapes us. And [Nicola], did you notice the effects of Kathie holding us?

N: Yeah, I did. Because it's not my thesis, I'm positioned really differently, so the effects of it were that I was thinking that [Kathie] would probably enjoy hearing her students talk about what we're doing together. And so that's really nice to think that we could ... take something back to the University. And her hearing it how the teachers positioned us in each conversation, how they watch what they say, and we got to talk about how we are doing that here. And I knew that Kathie would be listening. We all knew that she'd be listening. I sort of had pictured her sitting here smiling, listening. She wouldn't get many opportunities to hear. And we all seemed to appreciate it more as we spoke of ... what we were actually valuing.

K: And also being mindful of those discourses – the power discourses. I was thinking that [Kathie] wouldn't want us to not say where it was that we would find it difficult to speak. The fact that she was your lecturer ... she's still going to be the one who

will be marking your work. We can't get away from those things as well.

(Extract from a later e-mail from Kandyce): I thought it was important to notice, and not notice the effects of Kathie being there.

We were all concerned that this project represented us with stories that would make our experiences of working together useful to others. Friendship and loyalty were part of our concern about being “good participants”:

Kandyce: ... in terms of this research, I don't want to say 'I'm a bit too busy now Zoë', because I'm committed to you too. I feel your commitment to the research is my commitment to the work too.

Nicola: ... it's about caring about the fact that this is your research and we want to be doing this well for you as well.

How is “doing this well” decided? What continuum of “normality” would “well” sit on? Who would decide if we had done this “well”? Kandyce named this person as Kathie: “She is a key factor in ultimately you getting successful in this. She's a key power person in that ... for her role [as thesis supervisor and marker].” While Kathie may have been put forward as the judge of “doing this well”, I think our nervousness was partly produced by each of us judging ourselves. The internal policing of our own lives is a feature of modern technologies of power which serve to “reproduce the constructed norms of contemporary culture” (White, 2002, p. 43). We are recruited by these technologies of power to meet the socially-constructed ideals by which we are judged to be ‘normal’. The fear of falling short produced nervousness.

The other side of “doing well” is “doing not-so-well” or even “doing poorly”. This research project was being undertaken within a discourse of education which produces success and failure. It was not surprising, then, that we all experienced some nervousness, as what had previously been a more ‘private’ learning group became exposed not only to our own researching eyes, but also to my research supervisor's ‘examining’ eyes, and the eyes of an unknown examiner.

How did we manage to prevent this nervousness from taking over and stopping us from being able to make the contribution to this project that we hoped

we could? We were cheeky to it, we teased it, and we laughed about it. Kandyce expressed this when she spoke of this playfulness as being “energising and relaxing ... it makes me feel happy and comfortable.” Perhaps we wanted to show each other that we were in control of the nervousness (Dews et al., 2007)? At the same time as playfulness was working to relax us, it was also implicitly reproducing the discourses that produced the nervousness (Kotthoff, 2007). We were never outside of these discourses (Davies, 1991), but the playfulness allowed us some agency in “diminishing the extent to which the discursive context ... capture[d] and control[led our] activities” (Winslade & Monk, 2000, p. 100).

The non-verbal playfulness took the form of meaningful looks that ‘spoke’ of shared understandings, twinkles in eyes, giggles and outright laughter. There were nods of our heads towards each other, and hand gestures. When we turned off the recorder, we sometimes burst into gales of laughter which, I believe, took the edge off the seriousness which had held us during the conversation. Once, we joked about not wanting our swearwords recorded, but since we all liked to swear occasionally - another way of challenging nervousness? - we decided to get all the swearwords out before we started recording. This produced a lot of laughter and it made the slightest formation of swearwords with our lips while we were recording an occasion for more laughter. “Ironic activities are always interpreted in connection with the ongoing conversation, not as isolated acts. Among close friends, they tend to be understood in a playful frame, to be expanded through mutual responses” (Kotthoff, 2007, pp. 402–403). These “mutual responses” enabled us to hold on to our purpose in the face of nervousness while working together for this project.

4. Scaffolding into alternative discourses: Another way we used playfulness, was to scaffold each other into positions offered on the terms of alternative discourses. For example, we talked about how it would be if a man were to become a member of our group. I said, “... if ... he did not understand about White male privilege ... then we’d be in trouble.” Nicola quickly replied, “*He* would be, actually” (spoken emphasis). The unexpectedness (Critchley, 2002) of this comment, and its undermining of patriarchal discourses, caused a lot of laughter. Patriarchal discourses produced my assumption that it would take only one man to disrupt our way of working together. Nicola’s response gently unmasked (Witkin, 1999) this discourse and, at the same time, offered me another place to stand.

Kandyce spoke of “the things that might not be privileged, the conversations that might not come up” if we were to invite a man into the group. I agreed with her and replied, “we’re not willing to risk jeopardising [what we are able to do together] by introducing somebody who doesn’t have those shared understandings, shared meanings, and a shared ethic of care [that come with understanding patriarchal discourses that reproduce relationships of power].” I think that my concern that Kandyce, Nicola and I would be in trouble reflected my understanding of the pervasiveness, and often invisibility, of internalised, essentialised gender discourses (Gaddis et al., 2007). As Hare-Mustin (1994, p. 33) wrote, “one is never entirely free of the ways of thought in one’s time and place.” I believe that we all understood that to be invited into our group, a man would need to hold the same ethic of care in his intentions towards us as we would hold towards him. He would need to understand that despite these intentions, his actions or words might (albeit unintentionally) produce negative effects for us because of the ubiquitousness of discourses of male privilege. He would also need to be open to the “at times rigorous and difficult work to navigate gender discourse” (Gaddis et al., 2007, p. 44).

What Nicola reminded me of was our shared knowledge of discourse theory, including patriarchal discourses, and the agency to exercise power attached to such knowledge. Where a man’s action may be produced by dominant patriarchal discourses, such a “play of power includes, by definition, the possibility of refusal or the counter-force of revolt” (Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws, & Watson, 2002, p. 298). With three of us holding some understanding of such plays of power, it would be likely that we could use that knowledge to position ourselves more agentially.

Playfulness in our group relied on our shared understanding of narrative therapy, social constructionism, post-structuralism, and postmodern ways of looking at the world. I summed up our common links when I said “... we have a shared language, a shared understanding, a shared paradigm, a shared approach, a shared way of doing things ...” and Kandyce interjected “... a shared ethics.” Our responses to each other were expressions of not only listening, but “listening for speaking” (Goodwin, 1995; & Clark, 1996, as cited in Kotthoff, 2007, p. 402), and expressions of a shared ethics of practice. We listened for nuances of language, tones of voice, discourses and paradigm shifts. We ‘listened’ for each

other's body language. Our shared understandings contributed to a "social contract of humour" (Critchley, 2002, p. 5) in which we allowed ourselves to be transported by playfulness. "Such humor reinforces group identity and fosters a sense of cohesion" (Witkin, 1999, p. 103). Weaving playfulness into our conversations was one of the ways we found to hold on to a "spirit of learning". It also helped us to deconstruct discourses of personal failure and competition. Freeman, Espton, and Lobovits (1997, p. 197) capture the active part of this deconstruction in their playful language: "When it was high-spirited, infectious humor broke out and took the bite right out of the competition."

Holding our focus

A comparison with other groups

When I said to Nicola and Kandyce, "I'm wondering how we have [managed to keep our focus on practice], because we do work, every time we get together", I was reminded of some knowledge of another group where I had learned that they provided social support like ours but they hadn't gone as far as practising counselling skills with each other. So the question arises for me, how did our group go beyond social support into practice? How did we hold on to the practice focus to the point where every time we met to work together, we succeeded in doing so? I looked to the data to see if I could find some possible explanations.

Kandyce's response to my question above was that she thought we had kept our focus on practice out of "respect ... for this place, and our work" and our "commitment to each other", our "dedication to the work" and "making a difference with people." However, we recognised that our colleagues in other groups would surely share these values. So what then were the points of difference?

First point of difference

We came back to the topic of the difference between our group and others we had heard of later in our conversation. Nicola threw some light on a point of difference:

I think about the other students at Uni that met Zoë on the Discourse [and Counselling Psychologies] paper [HDCO544] and often I hear 'you're so lucky that's what you guys do down there'. It's actually not about luck.

It's about understanding, and I've only learnt to understand the importance of this.

Perhaps this was a point of difference: that we had somehow come to understand how important working together could be. I discuss what we considered to be of importance below.

I had watched this “understanding” that Nicola spoke of creeping up on her over our years of working together. She said, “the importance of [being part of a focused group] I didn't understand that much when I started. I knew that it was important, but I didn't understand *how* it was going to be important” (emphasis spoken). When we first met, I think that Kandyce and I also did not realise just how important working together would be, although I believe we both knew that it would be beneficial for us. I remember that we did not practise counselling skills the first time we met, but we vowed to do so at the next.

I was determined to hold to our intentions to practise narrative counselling skills. I said, “I could see immediately that [working with Kandyce] was not only going to give me [the support my colleagues in the community gave me], but so much more, because I would be able to practise exactly what I was learning [at the university].” What I ‘saw’ was a person who had completed the two papers I was about to do. I ‘saw’ that she had a better grasp of postmodern theory than I did, and that she was interested in discussing it. I felt safe with her because of her respectful way of speaking. I knew that if we could make it work, talking with her and practising with her would be valuable for my learning.

At the beginning, Kandyce knew that working with me would be valuable too. She said:

... as I was studying, I felt it was important for me to be connected to this group because we were so far away [from the university]. As well, as a new counsellor I felt it was important to me and my responsibility to clients to be connected to other professionals, and in the beginning when I was just with you [Zoë], I knew that you had been practising and it was safer for me. It was a matter of safety too. It was important. So I needed to do that.

By the time Nicola joined us, Kandyce and I had been meeting and practising together for over a year. In that time, I believe, we had come to an understanding of how important our work together had become. I said:

... it was so hard for me in that first paper, Working with Groups. I was just so confused, and wondering if I'd even go further in the programme because I was not sure that the programme would be a good fit for me. But because you and I met up and were talking, I was able to ask you points about the theory which I didn't understand at the start ... [and] you helped me understand the way I was being taught. You helped me understand what I was reading. And when it came to the first paper of the compulsory papers ... and the practising that we did with each other ... it helped me so much.

Perhaps the 'importance' that we discovered, then, was that what we do together is what I described as "more powerful or ... perhaps, richer, than what we can do on our own."

I believe that these "more powerful" or "richer" experiences contributed to a "migration of identity" (Crocket, 2004, p. 1). I think that we migrated from considering ourselves solitary students, engaging with our studies a long way from the university, to members of a community of practice and concern. Kandyce described this mixture of identity claims when she said, "You're going to do your own work and you're just getting a little bit of awhi (support), that's all, and a little bit of guidance."

"A community of practice, in addition to demonstrating skills and knowledge for its members, can be ... a tool to recalibrate the identities of people looking for new ways of being" (Islam, 2008, p. 209). Had we been looking for ways of resisting the discourse that positioned us only as independent learners in competition with each other and discovered that we could also take up identities as interdependent learners (Boud, 2001; Islam, 2008)? Had we been looking for new ways of being as a matter of course, since we were students of counselling? I remember holding a great deal of certainty at the beginning of the programme that I would be changed by engaging with the course requirements. Nicola asked us, "... is it a change [from identifying as a student to being able to claim you are a counsellor] towards the end of the programme?" Kandyce replied, "It's part of

study that you are expected to, isn't it ... and now we're kind of out there and we're [narrative therapists] by choice."

The importance of our group, and our awareness of the importance of it, has had its expression in the explorations of this project. What was not fully articulated in our dialogues has become clearer to me as I have analysed our words. This point of difference foreshadows the key finding of this project – that in the absence of local resources, the group provided a forum for the thickening of our professional identities.

Second point of difference

Nicola threw light on another possible point of difference when she said that "we always need someone ... to 'time' who needs to speak, and have a bit of a set thing." What she was referring to was our practice of looking at the time we had set aside to work together and dividing it up equally. Paying attention to the structure of our meetings meant that we would all get the chance to bring to the group whatever we wished, trusting that we would have our turn. However, this was not a hard and fast rule. Kandyce reminded us that "... we've also made it a space where things come up ... we might have something we want to talk about, but if things are pressing ... other things got a little bit bumped. We all did that, when things came up for us." An example of this was when Nicola asked us to watch and comment on a recording of her work before she presented it to the class. It was our only chance to do this before she went up to join her classmates in Hamilton, so we spent the two hours with Nicola centered in the work. I think this illustrates that our practice was both constrained and flexible.

I have outlined above two practices that I suspect may be points of difference between our group and other groups who have not stepped into practising counselling skills. I believe that we have been successful because we *understood* how important working together could be, and because we had a constraining but flexible structure for our meetings.

Third point of difference

Another possibility for other groups not taking up or holding a focus of practice is that their members may have had audiences for the performance of their professional identity shaping and so not feel the urgency we did. Perhaps they had access to supervisors who shared a narrative approach to counselling, or

they may have had more frequent contact with the lecturers at the university. In the absence of supervision with supervisors who understood narrative practice, our group provided an audience to our developing identities as narrative therapists.

In this next section, I explore how the *way* we chose to speak of what was important to us about working together, produced an account of that importance.

Using and erasing religious metaphors

In explaining the importance of working in our group, we found ourselves using religious metaphors. However, I think I spoke for all of us when I said, “[I] wish we could find another metaphor that’s not religious!” Kandyce echoed my words when she said, “I’m not religious ... but [being in this group] feels kind of like a religion to me. But not religion – it’s not the right word.” Nicola said, “Are we talking like a spiritual ...? That word feels a bit um ... you know.”

Despite our reluctance to use these religiously-associated metaphors, we were not able to find new ways to language our stories when it came to talking about how important the group was to each of us. I believe this illustrates how the discourses available to us restrict the words we are offered by those discourses to describe, and therefore constitute, our experiences (Davies, 1991). The metaphors we used were the only ones we had available to explain aspects of our experience. The metaphors were both “inaccurate and inappropriate” (Sampson, 1989, p. 7). I believe they were inaccurate in that we were not able to capture our experiences exactly as we wanted. I also believe that they were inappropriate because they risked reifying both our theoretical approach and our group practices, because such religious metaphors have long been used by members of religions, cults, and sects. I think that our discomfort in using them speaks of our reluctance to be aligned with such groups. Although I need to use these metaphors here to report what we discussed, I want to place them under erasure (Sampson, 1989). By placing them under erasure in this thesis I hope to avoid reifying our group, or positioning us somehow as a select group. I want to make this clear here, because I understand that “we ascribe meaning to our experience and constitute our lives and relationships through language” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 27). I also hope to avoid reifying narrative therapy. While it is my preferred way of working, it finds many expressions, and there are also many other expressions of therapy: “Life is

too rich and complex to be explained away by one approach or another” (Flaskas et al., 2000, p. 140).

I think that the religious metaphors we used were in part produced by what I described (using a religious metaphor!) as “the evangelical zeal that you feel when you first learn about [narrative therapy]. You want to tell the whole world because it’s just so amazing.” I think that the key words here are “when you first learn”. When our professional identities as narrative therapists were thinly described, perhaps we needed to hold on to the narrative ideas quite tightly. In the isolation of our community, our small group helped us hold tightly as we reached for richer descriptions together. Weingarten (in Flaskas et al., 2000, p. 133) wrote that “the impression many students of narrative therapy have [is] that they must forsake all other forms of practice in order to practise narrative therapy the ‘right’ way.”

My own experience aligns with Weingarten’s words. When I was learning a narrative approach to counselling, I certainly had the impression that there was an expectation on me to “forsake all other forms of practice in order to practise narrative therapy the ‘right’ way.” I understood that this ‘right’ way included an understanding of Foucauldian post-structuralist ideas about practices of power. It made sense to me to stop practising using other therapy approaches because I was at the university to learn about narrative therapy. I thought that there was not much point in using any other approach while on the programme. That I had other approaches to call on in my work positioned me differently from Nicola and Kandyce, neither of whom had been working as counsellors before entering the programme. By the end of the programme, in my own practice in Gisborne, I was able to weave narrative therapy into the way I had been working previously. However I still found in the transcript that I spoke of our work in the group as “hold[ing] me *faithful* to those [postmodern/narrative] ideas” (my emphasis).

Our work together meant more than staying “faithful” to postmodern ideas and narrative practices. Kandyce spoke of our work together:

... [it] reminds us of what we’re standing for too, doesn’t it. Coming back here. It validates what we’re doing and supports us in the work. It’s sort of like we get fed each time we come back ... and I don’t like to say it, but it’s like we’ve read the Bible together ... an ever-evolving one though ...

postmodern ... it's always changing, the pages are flicking and always asking questions ... [always] narrative.

The coming back to “get fed each time” has echoes of the faithful returning to the church for Holy Communion each Sunday. We met to “restore our faith” in narrative ideas. Nicola spoke of our group being “a life saver”, and Kandyce said it was “like a lifeline.” When I read through the transcript, words like “very sacred and valuable friendship”, “sacred space” and “what we are talking about today is what we hold sacred” (all spoken by Kandyce) stood out for me. Kandyce also said:

People belong to groups and they're so passionate about what they've got that they wish they could share it with you. But I kind of feel like that quietly with us. Others are missing out. And I feel like that when others talk about their religion. So this is our shared place and I get that. They've got that shared place, and this is ours, and it's our group. It's not something new people can just join.

Z: Kandyce and Nicola, what do you think the purpose was in our speaking of our group in this perhaps somewhat fervent way? What was “being brought into existence in [our] talk” (Drewery et al., 2000, p. 246)? What story were we creating about ourselves (Drewery et al., 2000)? How might this story position others reading our words? How else might we speak of our experiences?

K: It's our friendship. We're doing what we're doing but alongside [the practice and support], almost like paralleling it, and sitting with it, and moving with it, is the friendship.

Z: We're building the friendship by speaking about this way?

N: Probably.

K: I think so.

Z: So why would we ...call this a sacred space? I'm not saying it isn't but...

N: Those discourses come from Uni. Elmarie [Kotzé] talked about sacred space, and when she said it one day, when there was a counselling session, there was like a

bubble around [the session]. And you know something's happening there and it's much more than just the words. And I think as soon as she said that, everyone in the class went, "Oh, yeah." We know that there's this something that can happen.

K: Much more than words. The place here. And sacred doesn't fit for me...it's something else and I can't put my finger on it.

N: It's too big a word?

K: Maybe I've got the religious connotations going on...it's like aura and atmosphere for me. There's a spirit there – it's not the spirit of learning, but that's there as well...

N: It's like a spirit of friendship or something. Why do we have to have the word spirit in there? Why can't we just call it friendship?

"There are no stand-alone performances; actions gain their meaning through co-action" (Gergen, 2009b, p. 106). Drawing on the responses of Kandyce and Nicola to my questions about what the purpose might be of speaking about our experiences in our group in the passionate way we did, it seems that our preferred story is that we were performing friendship. Such "*relational scenarios* ... are coordinated actions extending over time" (emphasis in original) (Gergen, 2009b, p. 107). That we kept up the relational performance in the way that we did - hardly challenging each other's versions of our experiences, resorting to religious metaphors, spinning our quitting stories off each other's stories (see p. 74), and so on – perhaps speaks of our collusion in the desire to authenticate, foster and promote our friendships. These friendships are clearly important to each of us.

The work of this chapter

In this chapter, I have told some of the stories of how Nicola, Kandyce and I set a climate for our work together. I have written about the stands we took to position ourselves more agentially in the face of discourses of personal failure and competition, so that we might continue to work together in ways that were congruent with our hopes and intentions for ourselves. I have written about the practice of setting a receiving context before speaking; of how we held on to a

“spirit of learning”, at times quite playfully; and I have described how we held on to our intentions to work together rather than only socialise. I have outlined three points of difference between our group and others:

1. That we understood the importance of working together for the migration of our identities from student counsellors to narrative practitioners;
2. That we structured our time together, but were flexible with time when we felt the work brought to the group necessitated it; and
3. That the lack of an audience in our isolated community made our work together more urgent and valued.

I suggest that these points of difference were critical to our group’s working ethos. Finally, I have attempted to capture our ways of speaking about how important belonging to, and working in, our group was to each of us.

Chapter Five – *What We Did*

“Learning is ... a project of experimentation.” (May, 2005, p. 111)

In this chapter I have written about *what* we did in our work together that contributed to our professional identities and counselling practices. Because of our practice of setting a receiving context, what we did when we met was usually clearly delineated. For example, one of us might say, “Can you help me with this course work?” or “I’d like to practise externalising today” or “I have some concerns with client work.” What we did includes the following:

- Helping each other with course work,
- Practising narrative counselling skills, and
- Peer supervision.

I explore aspects of each of these ways we worked below.

Helping Each Other With Course Work

When Kandyce and I first met, it was with the idea that we might help each other with our course work as we went through the University programme. The initiative for our first meeting came from a wider community of concern. Kandyce spoke of this: “Paul [Flanagan, one of our lecturers] mentioned that you [Zoë] were starting...and I was in [the] Working with Groups [paper, HDCO540].” However it was not until our families became involved that we finally made contact. In response to Nicola’s question, “Can I ask how the group started, Zoë?”, I said:

I think because Maurice [my husband] is [a teacher] at Lytton [High School], and Kandyce’s mother works in the office there, I think Kandyce’s Mum said to Maurice, ‘Kandyce wants to get hold of Zoë because she’s heard she’s on the same course.’ And I can’t remember – one or other of us contacted the other and we decided that we would meet.

I wondered if stepping into the unknown world of each other’s lives in order to meet was made more possible by the implicit support of “a community of concerned and loving people” (Maisel, Epston, & Borden, 2004, p. 136).

- Z: Kandyce, what would you call this bridging between us by our families? I wondered about the word *whanaungatanga* (developing family relationships). What do you think?
- K: No, it was not *whanaungatanga* that brought me to you. It was actually...the land, it was *Tairawhiti*. It was *I* am from Gisborne, *you* are from Gisborne. I want to be here for you. And *then* the connections to people as well. I don't remember it being my mother, but even if it was my Mum, I still believe it would have been...that you come from the place I come from. Mason Durie (2001) talks about it...those sort of things that Māori often feel connected to. I [also] felt I had a responsibility to be here for you because Paul Flanagan [a lecturer on the programme] mentioned "Zoë's there and she's wanting to [do the MCouns. programme]." And it was about help and *awhi*. It was helping a colleague who was starting. And that's what makes me feel for you [Nicola] too, to be in with us. And the connection to Ritana [Lytton High School] as well...Maurice [Zoë's husband who works there]. So it's history. It was that [Maurice] came from the school I came from. He is therefore connected to me. He is, and you are, and now you [Nicola] are on the same *waka* (ship). (emphasis spoken)

In Kandyce's comments above, it is perhaps possible to see the working out of the ethic that underpinned the "value of sharing knowledge" which she had referred to when explaining how she was able to resist the discursive positioning of students in competition with other students (see Chapter Four – Stories of how we worked together). After I heard her speak of the connections between us – the shared geographical location, our families and Lytton High School, and the people at the University of Waikato, I began to understand the reference she had made to the "physicality and location – connection to [Hamilton and the University of Waikato]." She referred to this connection in our discussion about the difficulty of holding on to narrative ideas after returning to our homes when we had spent time with the community of narrative practitioners at the University. She said that she was "just thinking about people who feel connected to a place, and the people of a place and then they're moving away. I can see how that can happen." One of the important functions of our group was to provide a forum wherein we were able to hold on to narrative ideas by reproducing, in miniature, the University community of narrative practitioners.

I believe that the ethic of connection which Kandyce brought with her into our group contributed significantly to the work we were able to do together. Nicola and I responded to this ethic by taking up her invitation to connect, to share, to grow friendship, and to work towards our common goal of learning. Our connections were evident in the actions we performed for this research project – performances of trust, aroha, and friendship.

Kandyce introduced an ethic of connection the first time she and I met. It took the form of *willingness* (see below). Kandyce spoke of the hopes she held for our first meeting. She said, “I was thinking at that time that you were a trained counsellor, and you’d had experience...and that you were someone that I could, as I was trying to be a counsellor, ... work with.” I held quite thin conclusions (White, 1997) about my professional identity as a counsellor at that time, and felt I could claim no identity at all as a narrative therapist. It seemed strange to me, then, that Kandyce should have thought that I would somehow show her how being a counsellor could be done (which is what I think she implies she hoped I would do). I did not feel there was anything much I could help her with. My hopes were pinned on her being able to help me, particularly with the postmodern theories I was trying to come to grips with. I said to Kandyce, “[When we met] I thought ‘thank goodness, you can help me’, and you were thinking the same!” At the start of our working together, perhaps Kandyce was also feeling that her professional life as a counsellor was “thinly described” (White, 1997, p. 17) as she replied, “I was not thinking I could help you then. But I was willing to.” Kandyce’s willingness to help me opened space for me to ask her for help. I said to her:

I was able to ask you points about the theory which I didn’t understand at the start. You helped me understand the way I was being taught, you helped me understand what I was reading, and when it came to the first paper of the compulsory papers [HDCO541 Counselling Skills]...then I really needed help with, well, ‘how do you actually do this?’

Kandyce not only helped me with the theory, she also performed for me a way of living and behaving when you embrace postmodern assumptions. I said to her:

I know you said you didn’t feel positioned to be helping me with anything, but there has been a mentoring thing...because you’re in the cohort ahead of me on the course. But also because of the way you behave in the world.

And the word ‘gentleness’ has come into my mind ever since I first met you.

When Nicola joined us, we extended our willingness to help each other with course work to her. Kandyce said:

...you [Nicola] were beginning. And it was just the same as all of us. We were all wanting to support each other and that’s how I looked at it too. That you were someone who was wanting support in the narrative [approach].

Nicola reminded us of the time earlier this year when she was preparing to show a recording of her work to the class. She brought it to Kandyce and me and asked if we would watch it. She said:

...bringing my tape here and...getting your comments and things...you two gave me so much learning out of showing it here...the care I knew you two would [take]...but to say, at the same time, talk about the learning gaps. I knew I could invite you both to do that...to hear how you see it.

Thinking about the care Nicola says she knew Kandyce and I would take brought me to Noddings’s (1984) ‘ethic of caring’. This idea refers to creating and maintaining the conditions in which care will flourish (Noddings, 1984). I spoke of our “shared ethic of care” as one of the important values I believed that we held in common, although I wonder now about the discourses producing that care. Perhaps it was partly produced by our familiarity with the necessity for care that we as women are commonly required to step into in negotiating from “a position of low power” (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 23)?

Kandyce also spoke of care, and added “aroaha is going to come in there.” In speaking of aroaha amongst us, Kandyce named the reciprocity of care we experienced: “A person who has aroaha for another expresses genuine concern towards them and acts with their welfare in mind” (Barlow, 1991, p. 8). We all used the words ‘friend’ and ‘friendship’ to describe the connections between us. I think Kandyce summed it up for all of us when she said:

I’ve got a band of friends who are there, who are doing this sort of thing. And I can go wherever I like and know that I’m linked to two people who I consider as friends, colleagues in a shared profession.

Noddings (1984) wrote that an ‘ethic of caring’ entails not only caring for someone, but being committed to sustaining the caring. I believe that Kandyce’s words above express this commitment.

In this climate of care, we were able to teach each other and learn from each other. For example, we were able to help each other make connections between theory and practice. Kandyce said we were “connecting to the theory and the practices...drawing on lots of theorists...lots of ideas, and where we got this from, and books that we have, and we really brought that theoretical stuff in.”

Making these connections between theory and practice was something that we found we were able to do only in a few contexts. We could do this when we were studying or working on our own, when we were working with our lecturers and colleagues at the university, and when we were working together in our group. In our local professional community such opportunities were not widely available. In the last year, since each of us began skypeing narrative therapists in Hamilton for supervision, we have also been able to do this with our supervisors.

We three still find it difficult to talk to our professional colleagues in Gisborne about narrative therapy ideas. In her Practice Paper, Nicola (Carroll, 2011) described the gap between modernist and postmodernist paradigms as “the space in-between” (p. 3). She wrote about the struggle to find language to make the ideas and practices that contribute to a narrative approach to therapy accessible to “people whose whole framework of meaning [is] situated in a different paradigm” (Carroll, 2011, p. 5). Drawing on Davies’s ideas, Nicola (Carroll, 2011) asserted that being able to speak of the postmodern ideas that underpin a narrative approach to therapy is important because we use this speaking to construct our identities as therapists.

From the first day at the university we learn, by experiencing it, that our identities are co-constructed in relationships (Crocket & Kotzé, 2011)². What is significant here is that while Kandyce, Nicola and I were in Gisborne, we were able to provide each other with a place to speak about, and within, a postmodern therapeutic paradigm. In speaking to each other, we were able to build on postmodern discourses about ways to be in the world. We could speak about the theories that underpin a narrative approach to therapy that we were learning on the

² This teaching practice by which we experience identity as relational is described in Crocket and Kotzé (2011, p. 395).

programme. Since “we can only ever speak ourselves or be spoken into existence within the terms of available discourses” (Davies, 1991, p. 42), it seems particularly important that we were able to speak to each other about what we were learning while we were students on the MCouns. programme. When one of us was speaking, the other two provided an audience to that speaking. The connections between us of location, friendship, aroha and trust meant that our actions as audience carried significant weight in acknowledging and authenticating our identity claims (White, 2007). While we did not theorise these actions as audience in our conversations for this project, I can make a link to the “outsider witnessing” practices that we had learnt as part of the MCouns. programme, although we did not structure our responses in the way this practice proposes (see p. 24).

Undertaking any programme at a university is likely to have real effects on students’ lives. There are commitments of time, effort and money that must be made in order to be successful. Student counsellors going through the Waikato programme have added complexities to face since we not only undergo a great deal of professional development, but there is also a high likelihood that we will experience personal transformation. I mean transformation in the sense that the programme invites a paradigmatic shift from modernist ways of thinking into the postmodern. I wonder if this is as much a “shift in the tectonic plates of one’s assumptive clusters” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 139) for other students on the MCouns. programme, as it was for me. I wonder how many students would enter the programme with a postmodern worldview. Foucault (in Chambon, 1999, p. 53) understood that “transformative knowledge is disturbing by nature” because it “unhinges us from secure moorings.” It was certainly my experience that migrating towards a postmodern worldview was a difficult, and sometimes frightening, shift to make. However, there were times when it was also exhilarating for me, as I explained to Nicola and Kandyce, “that post-modern/discursive way of looking at the world is more respectful, and it’s completely freeing for me to be thinking about the world and what I do in that way.” Nicola also spoke of the positive effects of the paradigm shift, “Once you know [feelings of inadequacy are] actually [produced by] a discourse, it’s hugely liberating, isn’t it?”

Because this migration towards the postmodern is a shift into a non-dominant worldview, living in a remote provincial centre we find that there are few people with whom it can be discussed. As Nicola said, “It’s the whole approach that makes it really difficult to talk about.” Kandyce agreed: “The talk would be so foreign [to people who don’t understand that postmodern worldview]. When you think of the training we’ve done.” What a relief it was for us, then, that we had each other to talk to! As Nicola said:

I’ve been on the shaky ground thinking I don’t actually know when it might stop, or when it might settle. And to be able to hop off and make a phone call or to come and use the same language and have the shared meanings is just huge.

Nicola spoke about how being able to work with us in that shared paradigm “meant that I was able to carry on with the programme.” These words initiated stories from each of us about how we have managed, with each other’s help, to stay engaged with our studies, the university programme, and our work as counsellors. Weingarten (2005) says, “hope is a verb...[and] is something we do together.” I believe we were doing hope for our learning and practice alongside each other.

The stories we told each other were about times when we felt like quitting. For example, I said:

I’ve felt like quitting, too, at times, and this group’s kept me going. Being able to bring those difficult things. Especially the things at the university that I didn’t understand. Just having a place where I could talk about it in this postmodern way. Hearing your take on it. It’s kept me going, kept me on the course.

Kandyce said:

I was just at my end. I was nearly going to quit. I’d had enough. I’d really had enough. I just couldn’t see around the corner and felt like I was on the edge. And I think it was an e-mail to Zoë at that time...It was one e-mail back [from Zoë] that had me thinking, ‘no, keep going’...This is where I can come and be propped up.

At these difficult times, when Kandyce and I felt like quitting, we had chosen to speak or write to each other. I believe this is important, because if we had spoken

to anyone outside the programme about quitting, it is possible that they might have encouraged us to give it up. I think that in reaching out to each other, we must have had some knowing about the response we would receive. Perhaps this speaks of our intentions, hopes and dreams, that we would look for support to persevere rather than quit? Why would we want to continue on with the programme with the difficulties it brought, such as the modernist/postmodern paradigm shift and the anxiety of practising narrative conversation skills in front of classmates and teachers? As I have written elsewhere in this thesis, each of us understood that the philosophies underpinning the programme aligned well with the values we had come to hold dear. I believe the alignment with our values, along with a growing understanding that other, traditional, approaches did not so readily pay attention to positioning theory or technologies of power, meant that we were willing to persevere, despite the difficulties.

Z: Nicola and Kandyce, do you think we told these quitting stories to each other because we hoped that we would get the support to continue? Do we assume that not quitting was a good thing for us? Are you pleased that you stayed with it? What were the costs of staying with the programme, and the gains?

K: This [meeting of our group] is a space...where there are possibilities. And that time when I e-mailed you...at that moment...was actually like a lifeline to my study. It's important to say that we were meeting as well [not solely communicating via e-mail]. [The importance of what we have done together] is beyond [what you have written here]. There were dark and difficult times for me, and that I could come to this group was like a lifeline. You helped me professionally and personally. You helped me write letters. That was all part of peer supervision. They're important. And I think this space helps us in...being professionals. Stepping out in the world. It's the support we need to do what we need to do.

(Taken from an e-mail from Kandyce): I wonder if we *had* wanted to stop whether we would have thrown the "help" sign out. Perhaps we knew what we needed to [do in order to] continue on – support, encouragement, aroha and care, and someone who had faith in us.

Practising narrative conversation skills

A mandate for students

As I wrote in the previous chapter, my experience of struggling to find suitable words in class made me very determined to practise the skills of narrative therapy conversations with Kandyce and Nicola while I was away from the university. This practising was every bit as helpful as I had hoped, not only because it bolstered my confidence in class, but, more importantly to me, it helped me in my work with clients. I write “more importantly” because I believe there is a complex ethical issue to be considered when student counsellors are working with clients in the community. It was part of the requirements of the university that we disclosed to clients that we were students. However, this disclosure (and clients’ ‘informed consent’) was no guarantee that we could keep our clients safe from the potential harm we might cause by, for example, positioning our clients poorly because of a lack of understanding about power relations, or implicitly reproducing dominant discourses and the oppressive practices they offer.

The NZAC Code of Ethics (2002) states that counsellors are required to “refer clients to other counsellors who would be more appropriate by reason of their skills...” (clause 5.3.a) and “Counsellors shall work within the limits of their knowledge, training and experience” (clause 5.9.c). The dilemma here is that there will always be “counsellors who would be more appropriate [than student counsellors] by reason of their skills.” Who would judge what the limits might be of a student counsellor’s “knowledge, training and experience”? I do not mean to dismiss the skills and knowledges gleaned from their lives and experiences that student counsellors bring to their work, although I suspect that these skills and knowledges might not be what the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002) is intending in clause 5.9.c. So how can we, as student counsellors, find the mandate to begin? As I said to Nicola and Kandyce:

[Practising narrative conversation skills] is not something you can do, nor do I want to, with my clients. You can’t...well we are practising on them...but perhaps it felt safer to do it with the three of us, before I felt that I had some idea of what I was doing.

Medcalf (2011) helped me develop my thinking about this dilemma when he wrote that to “decide on our suitability to work with a client, and in ways that

meet our ethical obligation to work within our knowledge limitations” will require access to “knowledgeable and challenging support processes, such as a good supervisor” (pp. 150-151). We were all supervised by the staff at the university and, by the end of the programme, had supervisors whose practices were informed by postmodern ideas. However, for our day-to-day questions about counselling practice, we turned to each other. This informal way of learning and teaching probably reflects common cultural practice wherein “we draw upon whatever resources we need wherever we can find them” (Boud, 2001, p. 1), referring to each other before contacting teachers or supervisors. That we did turn to each other, rather than work in isolation, constitutes ethical practice. Therefore, I consider the practising of narrative enquiry skills in our group to be an important part of the way we worked together to meet our ethical obligations to our clients and the community. Our practising with each other provided us with access to each other’s knowledge, and we found the process to be both challenging and supportive. For example, see Chapter Four where I wrote about our practice of sharing knowledge. In that chapter I also gave an example of Kandyce and me challenging Nicola to try to use the counselling skills she had been reading about.

Support and trust

The support we gave each other went beyond sharing knowledge and giving each other space and time for practice. For example, Kandyce spoke of how things went for us when we were grappling with discourses of personal failure. She said, “we can just let [the feeling of not being good enough] off and relieve ourselves of it and still let each other support each other with it.” What was “absent but implicit” (White, 2000, p. 153) in Kandyce’s second use of the word “let” is that there were some contexts where we would not allow others to support us. So what might this say about our group, that we allowed ourselves to support each other in the practice of counselling skills? What might the context be that made this possible? Was it necessary for trust to be there?

All the literature on peer mentoring and supervision I have looked at mentions the importance of trust as a characteristic of successful peer relationships (for example, Crago & Crago, 2002; Cremers & Valkenburg, 2008; Hawken & Worral, 2002; McDougall & Beattie, 1997; McMahon, 2002). However, from a postmodern perspective, trust is not a characteristic or an

attribute that develops over time, but rather a context-dependent social construction which is “deployed flexibly by participants” (Willig, 1997, p. 212).

When I looked at the transcript of our conversations, I could not find places where we had talked about trust, although I could see traces of it in action. Perhaps we did not speak of it because it had become so familiar to us that it was taken for granted. It was implicit, I think, in the story that Nicola told us about bringing the recording of her work with a client to show us. She said that she felt safe because of “the care I knew you two would [take].”

Trust created the climate that made it possible for us to speak of how nervous we had been, the difficulties we had encountered, the joy of working with each other, and our friendship. Trust had been present every time we had shared our readings, quotes we had found helpful, our knowledge and our assignments. Kandyce spoke of trusting that we would not plagiarise her work if she showed us her assignments: “trust that you will do your own work.” Nicola said that “safety...was specifically about the time with you.” I think that trust is implied in Nicola’s words. I believe they speak of how she knew that we would not step into criticism or praise of each other because we had some understanding about how actions and behaviours are discursively produced, and how discourses offer positions that might not be helpful. She said:

Because if it was really bad in [the group], if you had a really bad experience of [being criticised], which you could have if you hadn’t got lots of other things in place first...[such as those things that are present] in the relationships. I suppose there is respect actually. But if you didn’t have that and you came here and you tried some stuff and the reaction wasn’t very good, it would be pretty hard to come back.

However, we did ‘come back’ to each other, time and time again.

Observing each other at work

One of the things we did when we came back to each other was practise narrative counselling conversation skills. To do this, we took turns counselling each other, with one of us being the client, and the other observing. One of the requirements of our first Counselling Skills paper (HDCO541) was to spend at least ten hours “observ[ing] experienced counsellors at work” (Kotzé, 2009, p. 1). I am not sure how one would judge if a counsellor was experienced or not. For

example, would a particular number of hours face-to-face need to have been completed for a counsellor to be described as experienced? Would that counsellor need to be demonstrating a narrative approach to be useful to a student learning narrative therapy? Despite lacking in experience as narrative therapists, we still found it useful observing each other practising counselling. As Nicola said, “I could see when you were doing the counselling what the counselling looked like.”

In our research conversations, I commented that practising being the counsellor had allowed me to:

...be able to say to you [Kandyce or Nicola], ‘hang on a minute, can you give me a minute so that I can think about how I’m going to word this question?’ And being able to get feedback like ‘how was it when I asked that question?’ and ‘what would have been a better question for me to have asked?’

Slowing down the conversational process of counselling gave us time to think, to be more mindful of the words we chose and their possible effects. Watching each other practise counselling helped us hear not only what the person we were observing chose to ask, but how that person delivered their questions – their tone of voice, body language, pace, and attitude. As I said: “...it’s not just the [narrative enquiry] skills, but *how* we’re delivering those [narrative enquiry] skills. It’s the *how* as well as the *what*. It’s more than ‘let’s try this technique of externalising’” (emphasis spoken). I spoke about what I had noticed in relation to the way Kandyce and Nicola counselled:

[Kandyce] you have role-modelled this gentle way of doing this therapy...and [Nicola], the way you practise seems to me to be very, very respectful. There’s the gentleness and the respectfulness that I have learnt from hearing you two practise in this group...I’ve heard the way you’ve done it...the careful, respectful, gentle way we’ve worked with each other...It’s changed what I do in practice.

Nicola had also noticed Kandyce’s gentle way of counselling. She spoke of a time when Kandyce had taken the counsellor role, and Nicola had been the client:

... seeing how narrative therapy is, in the way that you did it. You were gentle, so gentle with it. But we went [forward in the work]. Not cup-of-tea gentle...The way you did it was part of the conversation. And I thought

‘that is so gentle, and slow-paced’, and that’s what I needed to be reminded of. Slowing down.

Kandyce described our reciprocal roles of counsellor, client and observer as “...tuakana/teina. You might be tuakana, leading, and I’m teina following you and then it can swap. And then sometimes I’m the tuakana for you.” I have written about the relationship tuakana/teina in Chapter Three - the Method chapter - but remind readers here about the Māori concept of ‘ako’ which speaks of the reciprocal responsibilities of the tuakana/teina relationship. ‘Ako’ describes both teaching and learning with the one word (Eruera, 2004). We both taught and learnt from each other, regardless of how far through the programme we were, or how ‘experienced’ we were. I believe that Kandyce spoke for us all when she told us about the real effects of this practising for her: “Practising with each other, it’s enabled me to do the work, the practice here. And often taking it out [into counselling practice with clients].”

Practising our counselling skills in front of each other required courage. I remember feeling the weight of responsibility to perform both a postmodern way of counselling, and of looking at the world, especially for Nicola. Kandyce felt “nervousness” when Nicola joined us: “...there’s a new person coming and I’ll have two people to be considering...another responsibility.” Despite setting a receiving context, and holding on to a spirit of learning, as Kandyce said, “we were all feeling on edge and nervous.” I believe the persistence of nervousness was evidence of “the power of dominant discourses to reassert themselves” (Davies, 1998, p. 138). However, as regularly as nervousness persisted, we just as regularly pushed past it. This turned out to be particularly important to Nicola and me. Nicola said:

I thought ‘if you guys are prepared to put yourselves out here, making yourselves do it, then there’s got to be something in it’. I thought ‘you’re just going to have to watch’. And I could see that you talked about how nervous you were before coming to do some of the practices and I was pleased that that had been said, because [it was the] same [for me].

I asked her, “So, that we’d shared how we were feeling made something possible for you?” She replied, “Yeah. To not having done any therapy and thinking, ‘well, you guys are nervous, and I’m nervous’...I managed to pop through and keep going.” I spoke of my own experience of pushing through nervousness when I

said to Kandyce and Nicola, “That you guys keep pushing through things that I can see are hard for you as well. I can see you doing it, and I think ‘if you can do it, I can too’.”

Being the client

I have written above about the useful practices of counselling each other, and of observing each other counselling. As well, we took turns being the client. We found that being counselled was also a useful practice because it helped us find solutions to the diverse problems that we brought, or at least find another place to stand to look at them. As I noted:

I was thinking when you [both] were talking about low times, bringing personal difficulties here, that the counselling practising we were doing was having real effects on our lives, as Michael White would say...and I think [about] the narrative way of doing things, which is to look at the discourses and to find alternative stories. I’ve so desperately wanted that at times when I’ve brought stuff here that’s been troubling me. Even though we’ve only been practising, it’s still had real effects, being able to engage with somebody who’s got that approach.

Even though we were only students practising, I believe that our counselling practice had positive real effects, *because* we were using a narrative therapy approach to guide our work.

Postmodern therapy approaches such as narrative therapy do not require their practitioners to be experts who know what people should do (Weingarten, 1998). Instead, “the knowledges and skills of those who consult therapists shape, in significant ways, the practice of the therapy” (Morgan, 2000, p. vi). Our work is to “help people engage in making sense of their lives” (Weingarten, 1998, p. 2) rather than put forward explanations of their behaviours. This is not to say that we did not contribute to the “mutual co-construction of new meanings” (Paré, 1999, p. 7) by offering our own knowledges. What I am wanting to explain here is that I believe that our experiences of being helped, in the position of client, speak of the efficacy of working with a narrative approach.

The real effects I had noticed were storied by all of us. Kandyce said:

I think of all the things I’ve been going through since the beginning of the course, and the times that I’ve come here and brought issues, or problems,

or complexities, or difficulties, challenges. Whatever it was, I've felt that it's given me so much more strength to go on.

I said, "...it's so valuable to me personally, that I know I can come to you with whatever's bothering me and have that wonderful narrative counselling." Nicola said, "I would leave in a different place from where I came in. And that's just so valuable. For clients, and for us."

Peer supervision

As I came to the end of this chapter, I was aware that what was not yet explicit was the ways in which we offered each other peer supervision. What I have written so far in this chapter represents a strong story about learning, and peer supervision was an important part of this. My experience is that perhaps a third of our time over the past year has been spent in peer supervision – a change from our earlier days together when the majority of our time was spent on course work and practising narrative enquiry skills. However, increasingly, we brought our work with clients to the group, taking care to consider the privacy of our clients in line with the confidentiality requirements of the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002).

Offering supervision to each other served several purposes. For example, it helped us theorise what we were doing in our counselling practice with clients. As Nicola said, "the discussions of ... [what we were doing with clients and] the theory about what we were doing. That's been hugely valuable. I think I took big leaps ahead in my theoretical understanding by coming here and talking about [my client work]." It became clear to us all that understanding the philosophies that underpin a narrative approach to counselling is essential for "crafting the skills of counselling conversations" (Crocket & Kotzé, 2011, p. 401). It was in our peer supervision that we were able to refine our understandings of these philosophies.

Peer supervision helped us in our work with clients. The contribution of counsellor supervision to counsellors' work, and their clients' lives, has not been widely evidenced in the research literature (Crocket et al., 2009). Perhaps this is because much of the research on supervision has been written by or focuses on supervisors, and little written from practitioners' (let alone clients') points of view. Bob Manthei (2004) wrote that between 1991 and 2000, only 30% of the articles written for the New Zealand Journal of Counselling were authored by

practitioners. As a practitioner, I hope to make a small contribution here to the literature when I write that Kandyce, Nicola and I were able to trace the effects of peer supervision in our work.

An example of the tracing of the effects of peer supervision came when Kandyce asked me how our peer supervision had been useful, and how I would know this. I replied:

...the feedback from clients [has told me how useful it has been]. The more we worked together and the more I went through the course, the more I heard of that. So I know that what I've been doing here with you two has helped a lot of people.

Of course, it is difficult to know exactly how much peer supervision contributed to my clients' experience, especially because I had, at the same time, been learning so much on the MCouns. programme. I had also been engaged in regular supervision with experienced supervisors during this time. However there were times when I could clearly trace the effects of our peer supervision conversations in my work because of a particular issue we had discussed. I would take the learnings from our discussions back into my work.

Kandyce spoke strongly about the "narrative and the peer supervision we receive here...I feel quite firmly that it assists, and I *know* it has assisted my work in all those places. I have worked as a social worker, a teacher, a counsellor and an RTLB [a resource teacher of learning and behaviour]" (spoken emphasis).

Nicola also found that bringing client work to the group was useful because she said that Kandyce and I helped her think about the possibilities for practice, the "different ideas, the actual small how-to-do this narrative work." She in turn helped us.

We learned from and taught each other, in our tuakana/teina way of working. This way of engaging in supervision relates to one of Michael Carroll's (1999, p. 53) "seven generic tasks of supervision" – the teaching/learning task. However, as might be expected with modernist ideas dominating supervision literature and practice, the teaching and learning Carroll (1999) referred to was the idea that the practitioner would learn from the supervisor who would teach. I had previously experienced this way of engaging in supervision, both as a new counsellor and as a supervisor working with new counsellors. However, because

of our positioning as peers in our group, we slipped between teaching and learning, calling on each other's "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983) and academic knowledge.

There were other ways we engaged in peer supervision that reflected some of Carroll's (1999) generic tasks. In particular, his tasks of counselling and consulting I believe formed the greater part of our work together.

Carroll (1999) envisaged counselling and consulting as discrete supervision tasks. Perhaps this is because his ideas arose from modernist supervision discourses wherein such separations are considered possible. He was clear that "supervision is not counselling or therapy" although he acknowledged that practitioners "need a forum where they can deal with their personal feelings and reactions to work with clients" (Carroll, 1999, pp. 58–59). Similarly, Hawkins and Shohet (2006, p. 64) advised: "Personal material should only come into the session if it is directly affecting, or being affected by, the work discussed, or if it is affecting the supervision relationship." How such a clear distinction can be made is something of a puzzle to me. I find my experiences more in line with Speedy's (2000, p. 424) suggestion that "the dividing lines between personal therapy and professional supervision are sometimes far easier to draw on paper than in our working lives."

Regardless of the difficulties in determining dividing lines, ideas about supervision tasks having such boundaries have powerful effects. Kandyce said, "I couldn't use this space [as I do in the group] as broadly [bringing personal matters] if I was to do one-on-one supervision ... where you have supervision under an organisation which is paid for, there needs to be 'this is what we're here for'. It links to the organisation." I think this shows the power of those supervision discourses, and perhaps the hierarchical discourses that determine degrees of agency for people within organisations, because Kandyce was not a student counsellor who did not know what to ask for in supervision. She had learnt, as we all had on the MCouns. programme, to trouble supervision discourses that position practitioners poorly in "unilateral construction[s] of supervision" (Crocket, 2002a, p. 20)³. The discourses constraining agency arose from that organisational supervision being paid for. As Kandyce said, "if

³ See also (Crocket, 2002b)

[supervision] were peer and it was voluntary...you'd have a shared investment in it."

In our peer supervision work, we were not interested in making distinctions between the personal/counselling and the professional/consultation. Kandyce spoke of there being "boundaries [in one-on-one supervision] and you don't go personal. Whereas I feel I could bring personal stuff here." We did not consider the personal and the professional a binary. As Kandyce said, "Isn't the personal our professional in this field? So where we're bringing our personal we're helping our professional [practice] too? If we dealt with what we've got it might help others." Nicola replied, "[The personal and professional] can't be separated." What we did in practice as we worked with the various personal/professional matters was the same - we practised our narrative conversation skills.

Another of the purposes of peer supervision that became visible to us during our research conversations was that it helped us engage with ethics. This practice aligns with Carroll's (1999, p. 62) task of "monitoring the professional/ethical dimensions of client work." However, we did not see this as a "gatekeeping role" (Carroll, 1999, p. 62) since we did not hold any responsibility for each other's work. Nicola spoke about bringing ethics in to our work:

...the [NZAC] Code of Ethics has been part of our conversations and that's been really important to me actually. Because it's meant that I have had the Code of Ethics closer to me, whereas I haven't had them in the past. And that's not conversations I've had with other colleagues outside of here.

When I reflected on our practice of referring to the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002) during our peer supervision sessions, I could see several contexts from which it was produced.

Firstly, I had been offering supervision to other practitioners for several years. Referring to codes of ethics had become part of my usual practice. This 'usual practice' had developed as a result of my experience of how useful codes of ethics are to help navigate the tricky terrain of ethical dilemmas. It seemed, therefore, a useful thing to do to bring the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002) into the peer supervision work we did in our group.

Secondly, the University of Waikato programme has adopted the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002) to guide not only students' work, but also the practices of the university staff (Crocket & Kotzé, 2011; Kotzé, 2009). It was made quite clear to us, in paper outlines and in classroom talk, that we were to take our ethical obligations very seriously. Once again, I can see that our group practices echoed the university practices.

Thirdly, Nicola made a connection between ethics and narrative therapy: "I really feel narrative is very concerned with ethics." Kandyce and I agreed with her at once. Part of what drew us to embark and continue on the programme to learn a narrative approach to therapy was our understanding of its congruence with our ideas about social justice (see White, 1989, 2000). As Kandyce said, "...it aligns to our values."

We discovered, as we spoke of them, that we shared many values – "respect for difference", "care in conversations", "openness to learning", an "ethic of caring", appreciating that "everyone has a voice", and "working alongside each other...rather than I'm the expert and [others] are not." Nicola reminded us of Mark Hayward's (Flaskas et al., 2000, p. 136) opinion that "choice of working style is more to do with the fit with the therapist than anything else." I believe that each of us had come to understand that a narrative approach to therapy stands firmly on what Michael White (2011) described thus:

personal and community ethics that encourage [us] to honor what people say about the consequences of:

- Abuses of power within the therapeutic relationship
- The reproduction of the power relations of local culture, including those of heterosexual dominance
- Expressions of white dominance and the forms of these expressions
- The acknowledgement of the contribution of the people who seek consultation [and]
- The contribution of outsider-witnesses and the importance of decentering the therapist through privileging the macro-world of life over the micro-world of therapy. (p. 40)

While not all of these ethical considerations are made explicit in the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002), I think that its general principles reflect them. I believe that the

spirit of a narrative approach invited us to step into the sort of supervision practice where the NZAC Code of Ethics would be welcome. As Nicola commented: "...it's more than three women sitting around and talking about the work."

As I quote above, Nicola spoke of how she had not had conversations about ethics with colleagues outside of our group. I believe that bringing the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002) into our conversations located us within the broader therapy community, even if Nicola's experience shows ethics may not often be brought into collegial conversations. We were a small community of practice located within a larger community of practice. We were aware of our place within this larger community of practice, and in particular the placements Kandyce and Nicola were in. Many of our discussions explored these contexts. Nicola spoke of the usefulness of "knowing that [particular counselling and organisational discourses were producing practice], having the theory to understand it instead of going back into personal failure, discourses of blame."

The final purpose of our peer supervision that I show here is that we were able to work within a postmodern paradigm. I have found little in the literature about the importance of matching paradigms in supervision. It is an area of practice that "has not received much attention" (Holloway, 1999, p. 27). Vivianne Flintoff (1997), after hearing stories from student counsellors about their difficulties with cross-paradigm supervision, posited that it might not be possible for supervisors working in a modernist paradigm to effectively supervise student counsellors who are working in, and learning about, a postmodern paradigm. My own experience of supervision produced by modernist discourses was that it was useful in working through ethical dilemmas, for example, but the difficulties became apparent to me when trying to decide what action to take. The actions prescribed by modernist ideas about counselling were often at odds with my understanding of what was ethically consistent with a postmodern philosophy. The difficulties encountered in cross-paradigm supervision are not the focus of this research, but it is clear to all of us that these difficulties made us greatly appreciate what we were able to do in our matched-paradigm peer supervision.

The work of this chapter

In this chapter I have told some of the stories about what Kandyce, Nicola and I did when we met in to work in our peer learning group. I have described how an

“ethic of caring” (Noddings, 1984) helped us position ourselves as tuakana/teina, teaching and learning from each other as we grappled with our course work and worked in peer supervision. I have shown how we practised narrative conversation skills, and the climate we created in which it was possible to do this. I have written of the real effects on our lives of practising with each other in the roles of counsellors, clients, and observers. I have discussed the purposes of offering each other peer supervision, the effects of this peer supervision on our counselling practices, and our engagement with the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002). Finally I have written of how important it was to us that the peer supervision we engaged in was paradigm-matched.

Chapter Six – The Implications for Professional Identity

In this chapter I write of the implications of our group and its work for our professional identities. I begin with a brief overview of the contexts and practices that support the shaping of identity. I then draw on the transcripts of our research conversations to offer two stories about identity. The first story tells of the difficulties we encountered in shaping identities as narrative practitioners where newness as counsellors intersected with the location of narrative therapy in the world. I offer this story to throw into relief how our group provided a place to articulate, and have authenticated, our fledgling identities as narrative practitioners in the absence of other locally-available forums – the key finding of this study. The second story shows a performance of identity. I offer this story to show how our group worked to scaffold the migration of identity beyond close descriptions of identity as narrative practitioners, to identity claims that fit more easily in other professional contexts. This second story provides a backdrop for the final part of this chapter which tracks a “line of flight” beyond our small, local community of practice into the wider context of a philosophy of living.

Contexts and practices that support the shaping of identity

Contexts for the shaping of identity

Believing that identity is “a product of the clustering of repeated identity positions accepted and taken up in a multitude of conversations” (Winslade, 2005, p. 355) (see also Chapter One), I have storied in Chapters Four and Five our accounts of the ways in which we offered each other “repeated identity positions” over the course of many conversations. The context for these conversations was our group. Our small, local community of practice provided a place, a community, and a process where our identities were, and continue to be, produced and shaped both as narrative therapists, and in other professional and personal domains. However, as Clarke (2008) argued, in the context of teaching, professional identities are also produced by a sense of being part of a larger community. The closest larger community for Nicola, Kandyce and me is the Gisborne branch of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors. We are all members of NZAC. There are bi-monthly meetings that we attend, and a network of local practitioners

with whom we keep in contact outside these meetings. We are also members of the University of Waikato community of narrative practitioners and counsellor educators. Wider still, we have a sense of being linked to narrative therapists across the world. The connection is fostered by, for example, reading e-newsletters from the Dulwich Centre (where Michael White worked), and the International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work.

Practices that support the shaping of identity

The link between actions and identity: Clarke (2008, p. 39) wrote that "... identities are constructed ... as we learn through participation in meaningful activities that comprise the figured worlds ... that have value within particular communities." The actions we took in our group were meaningful activities that contributed significantly to the shaping of our professional identities. I spoke to Kandyce and Nicola about this when I said:

... because I'm able to sustain the narrative practices [due to] the work we've done together, and continue to do, then I'm able to claim that identity as a narrative therapist. Because without the practice there's no identity [as a narrative therapist] for me. So this [group] sustains my practice and sustains my identity.

As the accounts in the preceding two chapters have shown, Nicola, Kandyce, and I have taken up strong identities as narrative practitioners. The actions we took – meeting regularly for support and consultation; scaffolding each other into our course work; practising narrative enquiry skills; and offering peer supervision – had, and continue to have, real effects for the shaping of our professional identities. Our actions were guided by narrative therapy practices such as the mapping of each other's stories using "landscape of action" and "landscape of consciousness" questions (White, 2007, p. 78). "Landscape of action" questions elicit details about events and themes over time, while "landscape of consciousness" questions enquire about the meaning the narrator makes of those events and themes, and the identity conclusions they may come to, based on those meanings (White, 2007). "It is in the trafficking of stories about our own and each other's lives that identity is constructed" (White, 2007, p. 80).

The role of supervision in the shaping of identity: An important forum for the storying of professional identity is supervision (Crocket, 2001a, 2001b, 2002b). "If we believe that identity is public and social, cultural and historical, the storying of professional identity is not a *self*-centred activity inappropriate to

supervision, but a relationally-centred activity that engages with the professional self-in-relation” (Crocket, 2002a, p. 22) (emphasis in original). In the absence of a local supervisor who practised narrative approaches, Nicola, Kandyce and I were able to offer each other the “relationally-centred activity” of peer supervision.

Two stories about identity

Our research question asked how and what our group contributed to our professional identities. The transcripts offered two stories about identity. One told of the difficulty of constructing professional identity at the intersection where newness as counsellors met the postmodern paradigm upon which narrative therapy rests. The second story told of the migration of professional identity (Crocket, 2004) from a claim of being professionals in the sense of being narrative therapists, to a much broader claim of being professionals whose approach to work in any field of endeavour is underpinned by a narrative way of thinking.

The intersection of newness and narrative

The story about the intersection of newness as counsellors, and a narrative approach to counselling, began with Nicola telling us of the discomfort that came with the positioning she had encountered as a student counsellor in a placement where the postmodern ideas informing a narrative approach, and the practices of narrative therapy were unfamiliar. She said:

I couldn’t thicken the description of my identity as a professional counsellor at the placement very well because there wasn’t a community of shared meanings, or understandings of the language of narrative, or anything like that ... I realise [this group has] had a big impact on this construction of professional identity as a counsellor.

Kandyce had also found construction of an identity as a professional counsellor difficult on her placements. She said, “ [I] felt like I was a newbie, but [I was] still holding on to the narrative.” I can remember Kandyce talking to us at other times about being asked to ‘diagnose’ clients using modernist assessment tools. She was required to “adopt a certain identity” (Gergen, 2009b, p. 136) in order to meet her professional obligations. She explained this as feeling “tested...to do what you’re told to do, which conflicted with a lot of my narrative thinking.”

I believe that what was missing for both Kandyce and Nicola in their placements was the opportunity for authentication of their preferred identities as

narrative therapists. There was no “forum of acknowledgement” (White, 1997, p. 18). In the absence of other counsellors who knew narrative practice, they could not story their new identities to their colleagues in their placements. I believe that this is where our group came into its own. As Nicola quipped, when we asked her how much our group had shaped her professional identity when she was a student, “totally”.

Nicola was joking, of course, and we all laughed. Kandyce and I recognised Nicola’s utterance as humour because we knew, as Nicola did, that identity is “constructed across innumerable sites and situations and within a range of contexts” (Clarke, 2008, p. 26). However, our group meetings had become a very important forum wherein our identities could be performed and audenced, storied, and co-constructed. In Chapter One I wrote of the possibility for negotiation of identity by the performance of it in communities of practice. I picked up this idea again in Chapter Two in the context of the shaping of professional identity where I wrote that professional identity is a moment to moment performance within a particular context, arising out of the discourses available in that context. In Chapter Four I suggested that other peer groups may not have felt the urgency for holding practice as their focus since their members’ fledgling identities as narrative therapists may have been audenced by supervisors with a narrative approach, or by the lecturers at the university with whom they may have had more frequent contact than we were able to. As students, Kandyce, Nicola and I were studying in a distance programme, with an on-line component, and block teaching in Hamilton - a difficult five-hour drive away. In our rural location, a supervisor who practised narrative approaches was not available. The key point here is that our group provided an audience which was able to repeatedly witness, comprehend, and authenticate the performances of our growing professional identities. Our identities were collaboratively shaped by these repeated performances, and the repeated witnessing of them.

As well as providing a forum for the performance of professional identity, our group meetings worked to decrease the isolation we felt as narrative therapists within the broader counselling community, dominated as it is by modernist therapy approaches. Nicola asked, “is [the value to us of our group also] because of how narrative is positioned? How narrative is postmodern and on the fringes? Is [getting together in a group] as important for other people in modernist

frameworks?” When Nicola asked this, I wondered about the connection between newness as a narrative therapist and the perception of narrative therapy in the broader counselling community. If there is a perception that narrative therapy is, as Nicola described it, “on the fringes”, or elitist (Doan, 1998; Flaskas et al., 2000), then how might this perception position a person learning narrative therapy, especially one in a placement where there is little familiarity with postmodern or narrative ideas? Could the struggle to position yourself as different (and thereby risking positioning others as “wrong”) produce antagonism?

The perception of narrative being “on the fringes” or elitist is encouraged by the attention its therapists pay to language. Nicola (Carroll, 2011) wrote of a colleague who told her, “Narrative therapy is full of jargon and theory and it puts me off reading about it” (p. 5). In his note about the use of language, Michael White (1997, p. ix) anticipated readers’ questions, such as, “Why doesn’t he just say this in plain English? Why does he have to use jargon which obscures what he is saying?” He responded to these imagined questions by explaining that familiar words are products of particular discourses which have effects that may form part of the problems people bring to therapy (White, 1997). If we do not pay attention to the words we use, then we may reproduce these effects. However, this point of view is proffered from a postmodern position, which means that it may not be understandable from a modernist standpoint. Narrative therapists may instead be perceived as taking something of a moral high ground (Crocket, Kotzé, et al., 2007), contributing to the positioning of the approach and its practitioners as “on the fringes”. So although we narrative therapists do not want to be perceived as elite or positioned “on the fringes”, it seems perhaps unavoidable that we will be if we cannot find our ways in shared understandings. I find hope in the words of Crocket, Kotzé and Flintoff (2007, p. 31) who advised that “in the face of both possibilities - apparently setting ourselves apart, or being found wanting – caring solidarity reminds us to offer generosity toward ourselves and others.” The “caring solidarity” we offered each other in our group has supported the shaping of our professional identities as we navigate our professional contexts.

Broader identity claims

The second story on which I focus in this chapter is a story about the evolution of professional identity from that of narrative therapists, to a broader idea of holding a narrative way of thinking while working as professionals in

other fields. I could see, as I read through the transcript, that the way we had co-constructed knowledge was by asking each other questions and responding to them. Gergen (1985, p. 270) wrote that “knowledge is not something that people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together.”

Hints of this second story were visible within the first few minutes of our conversation when Kandyce said “...coming here enables me to still hold on to [that narrative way of working]...[I] still know I *can* do it, and I *want* to keep doing it” (emphasis spoken). Every utterance relates to its context, with stories arising from other stories (Drewery et al., 2000). The contexts from which Kandyce’s words arose became clearer as the conversation progressed. She was holding two concerns. She felt concerned that she might lose some of her narrative way of working, because she had relinquished a counselling contract in order to take up a full-time position as an RTLB. At the time of this conversation, she was seeing a only few clients for counselling. She was also concerned that if she was no longer practising narrative therapy as a counsellor, she might not feel that she could continue working with Nicola and me. She said, “I had to make some decisions around a new job. I thought ‘I won’t be able to come here [to be part of our group], because I’m not doing enough counselling work’.”

This story began in earnest about half-way through the conversation. In what follows, I offer longer excerpts from the transcript because I think it illustrates our typical group practice. The excerpts show non-continuous snippets (for the sake of brevity) of the work Nicola and I did with Kandyce to co-construct a new identity claim. Nicola and I held Kandyce centered in the work, as we collaborated in questioning her. At the same time, we asked questions to elicit a richer story for the purposes of this research project. I think our work illustrates Deleuze’s (cited in May, 2005, p. 59) idea that “there is no being beyond becoming, nothing beyond multiplicity.” In the course of this conversation, Kandyce was shown to be in the process of “becoming” as the three of us spoke her into “being”.

Nicola and I used a narrative approach to scaffold Kandyce into coming to a new understanding of how she might conceptualise continuing to be a member of our group, and engage in narrative practices with us, despite now working full-time as an RTLB. For example, we asked landscape of action and landscape of identity questions (White, 2007); we used relational externalising language (Bird,

2000); and we used Kandyce's words in our questions in order to stay close to her meanings (Epston & White, 1992). To keep this illustration as brief as possible, while still showing some of the work we did, I show only glimpses of the narrative conversation skills we used in this particular conversation:

Kandyce: Well, I have been thinking about my [narrative] books up on the shelf and I'm scared that they're collecting dust, and that bothers me ... I'd like to bring those books back down ... In this RTLB work we're learning a whole lot of other stuff ... I've not wanted to let go of the narrative ... So I want to stay connected to this group. And also staying connected with you two reminds me of what I do love to do as well ... I'm actually using the time here to help me with my work as an RTLB, strangely enough.

Zoë: How are you using the time here to help you with that?

Kandyce: One, with the discourses that are [in the RTLB work]. It's helping me with that. It's helping me cope with the discourses that are difficult to understand and accept. So in a way, it's helping me as a professional ... so I've tweaked [our peer supervision] to do that aspect of my work ... in actual fact, I think I could still be part of this group if I decided to go and ... pick mandarins, or whatever. It wouldn't really matter ... it could work no matter where we go ... narrative would be helpful anywhere, for all sorts of things ... you're actually able to shift [what we do here] a little bit to make it work. This [way of working] can do that, this [group] allows it. I'm thinking right now, at this very moment, that in actual fact I could still be here as a narrative practitioner even if I didn't 'practise' literally in the counselling sense. I would still be practising narrative in my life with others...I don't know what you'd call it if I didn't practise [professionally] ... I could still come even if I didn't practise.

Nicola: So it's the shared meanings more than the actual identity?

Kandyce: Yes. It goes beyond. It's like a [postmodern] way of thinking really. It's become a way of living, thinking, talking, moving and breathing even.

Zoë: Maybe that's the identity claim? 'That way of thinking' is the identity claim that doesn't shift with the change of profession?

Kandyce: Yeah.

Nicola: It's much more than shaping our professional identities as counsellors, the group. I suppose there's multiple stories in it, but that's *one*. (emphasis spoken)

Kandyce: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. [The scope of what the group does is] really broad. And it can accommodate broadening because it is narrative, socially-constructed and postmodern. It is not rigid, but open, open to what might be made possible because of it being narrative.

Zoë: So are you saying then that the practice that we have here is contributing to your professional identity, but professional identity isn't as narrow as we were thinking about at the beginning of this conversation? That professional identity doesn't necessarily mean as a narrative therapist? It means as a professional working out there in the world, no matter what?

Kandyce: Mm. It's actually shaping professional identity, human identity really.

Nicola: Not just our professional identity.

Kandyce: Yes. It's not compartmentalised. For me it's holistic, spiritual, an identity which can move with the work, with us and with our lives. It's like an approach we can take anywhere, any time, and any place.

In offering a place to articulate, and have authenticated, our identities as narrative practitioners, our group has supported the shaping of our professional identities as we each move into the complexities of other professional contexts. In the conversation above, which shows the fluidity of identity, we have produced something new from the multiplicity of possibilities. The possibilities open to us to produce and perform our identities are always limited by the discourses that are available to us, and the positions they offer (Davies, 1991; Winslade, 2009). However, in a peer professional learning group, as I have shown in Chapters Four and Five, it is possible "to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted" (Davies, 1991, p. 51). Through small acts of resistance – for example, by using humour to hold on to a spirit of learning –

we were able to “resist and subvert” the power of discourses to position us to act in ways contrary to our preference for learning. Resisting and subverting allowed us to shape new trajectories for our counselling practices and professional identities.

In writing of Deleuze’s conception of lines of trajectory formed by the actions of power, Winslade (2009, p. 338) wrote that the bending of such trajectories by resisting power creates new “directions rather than destinations.” These “lines of flight” provide an “escape from places where lines of power squeeze out the sense of being alive” (Winslade, 2009, p. 338). The work of our group was in providing a degree of difference in the trajectory of our lines of flight. This second story provides an illustration of the way we worked collaboratively to change the direction of a trajectory. We moved in the direction of the possibilities which lie beyond the idea of professional practice being narrowly conceived, while at the same time holding on to the responsibilities that we understand come with practising professionally. The “lines of flight” we have made possible for ourselves and each other shoot us out in a multitude of possible future directions.

The Work of this Chapter:

In this chapter I provided a brief overview of some of the contexts and practices that shape identity. I then offered two stories about identity from the research transcripts. The first showed the difficulty of thickening identity at the intersection of newness as a counsellor, and the place of narrative in the world. The second story showed how collaborative practice provided a sufficient degree of difference to influence the trajectory of a ‘line of flight’.

Chapter Seven - Conclusion

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I explored some stories of *how* our peer professional learning group worked together, *what* we did together, and the *implications* of this work for our professional identities. Based on these stories, I conclude that our community of practice had a very important role to play in contributing to each of our professional identities and counselling practices. Not only has the group provided a forum for the performance and audiencing of our professional identities, but, critically, it has provided a forum for the authentication of those identities too. The performing of knowledge before an audience of people who have some understanding about what they are witnessing, and can respond to what they witness in ways that acknowledge the performance, offers opportunities for the authentication of the knowledge claims (White, 1997). The arena our group offered for the performing of knowledge was significant because of our shared understandings. “It is ... through these arenas that people can achieve a ‘full’ or ‘thick’ description of these knowledges, and of their personal identities” (White, 1997, p. 14).

Not only did our group provide a significant arena for the performance and audiencing of our professional identities, but also it fulfilled the important task of supporting us through the migration of those professional identities in the liminal period between the teaching of professional practices at the university and the taking up of professional identities in our counselling practices in Gisborne. For some students who are learning to use a narrative approach to counselling, engaging in fortnightly supervision with a narrative therapist gives them a chance to perform their fledgling professional identities and have their performances authenticated. Other students learning a narrative approach may be in agencies where they can observe narrative practitioners counselling. In the absence of narrative supervisors, and other narrative practitioners in our location, the question was, ‘how were Kandyce, Nicola and I to have the “participation in meaningful activities” (Clarke, 2008, p. 39) that could support us through the liminal phase of taking up our professional identities as narrative practitioners?’ We co-constructed “meaningful activities” by meeting to help each other with our course work, practising narrative conversation skills, engaging in peer supervision, and watching each other practise. By participating in these “meaningful activities”, we performed knowledge, and audienced each other, to

migrate our identities from student counsellors to professional narrative counsellors.

There were two levels to the performance of knowledge, and the audiencing we collaborated in:

1. We were able to talk within our group using the shared language of a postmodern, narrative approach to counselling. In our conversations, we were performing as narrative counsellors when speaking of our own experiences, when speaking of the theories supporting our work, and when speaking about narrative practices;
2. We practised counselling each other with a narrative approach. We offered each other audiences to this work, both when we took our turns as counsellors and then as clients.

In these two ways of performing knowledge, and audiencing each other's performance of this knowledge, our peer professional learning group provided a local and specific "forum of acknowledgement" (White, 1997, p. 13) in which we were able to thicken, and authenticate, our identities as narrative practitioners.

Practice implications of the findings of this study

The accounts of our group that I have produced in this document are specific to our location, both geographically, and in narrative practice. The specifics of location include that Kandyce, Nicola and I live in Gisborne, a small geographically isolated community; and that we live in Aotearoa New Zealand. As well, our location in postmodern practice situates us away from mainstream counselling approaches. The narrow location of this small piece of local research may seem too contingent to extrapolate into implications. However, there would be little point in carrying out research unless its findings can be used to offer some recommendations or, at the very least, tender some ideas that might be useful to others in similar situations (Elliott, 2005).

I briefly return here to the rationale for this study that I set out in Chapter One:

1. The NZAC (2002) Code of Ethics asks counsellors to undertake research in order "to inform and develop counselling practice" (Clause 11.1a);

2. Crocket (2001a, p. 79) wrote about the importance of “investigating the social, cultural, and historical nature” of our supervision practice in order that we be instrumental in shaping our own practice;
3. Manthei (2004) urged counsellor practitioners to undertake research for “compelling ethical, economic and accountability-based reasons” (p. 70);
4. The registration requirements for counsellors here in Aotearoa New Zealand are currently being negotiated. Supervision will be mandated. My hope is that the findings of this study will contribute to the policy makers’ understanding of ‘good enough’ supervision;
5. Students in rural communities may be disadvantaged by the absence of a forum or arena for the performance and audiencing of professional identity, particularly if the students are engaged in postmodern approaches to counselling practice. I believe that the practices of our peer professional learning group can offer a way to mitigate the disadvantages of geographical and paradigm isolation;
6. There is very little written about matched-paradigm supervision – its importance, and its practice (Flintoff, 1997).

Some recommendations

With the support of the above reasons for both carrying out research and making its findings available, I offer four recommendations. I make no claims here that the findings, upon which these recommendations are based, are generalizable. Rather, I invite readers to adopt a “‘common sense’ view of generalizability” (Elliott, 2005, p. 26) in order to decide which parts of these findings, if any, can be transferred to their own situations.

1. If we hold with the view that knowledge is socially constructed, a forum outside the university in which knowledge can be performed and authenticated must be vital for new counsellors. When knowledge is authenticated, then it is possible for people to thicken their identities (White, 1997). Therefore, student counsellors can benefit from, and indeed require, a forum or arena in which they can perform, and have audienced, their fledgling, thinly-described professional identities. The forum or arena can be provided by supervisors, other practitioners, or a peer group. I believe that this study shows how important it is that the supervisor, practitioner, or peer group providing the forum share the same paradigm as

the student counsellor *if* the student counsellor is learning a postmodern approach to counselling. Supervision is mandated both by the University of Waikato, and also by NZAC. Student counsellors learning a postmodern approach to counselling may not be aware of the importance of sharing the same paradigm as their supervisor, particularly when they are at the beginning of their studies. To compound this difficulty, supervisors with a modernist approach may not understand the importance of sharing the same paradigm as the practitioners they supervise. In addition, many counsellors, and students in particular, accept the supervisors assigned to them, engage someone in close proximity, or follow advice from other practitioners without any thought to matching paradigms, or even counselling approaches (Proctor, 1994). However, since supervision is an ethical requirement, the chosen method of our professional body for accountability to clients, and “a major training tool” (Proctor, 1994, p. 309) the choice of supervisor should not be left to chance.

My recommendation is that counsellor educators at the University of Waikato, and in other institutions where a postmodern approach to counselling is taught, advise their students, as they work through counsellor programmes, to engage a supervisor with a postmodern approach to supervision. Where matching-paradigm supervision is not available, counsellor educators must prepare their students’ non-narrative supervisors to work across the paradigms. Counsellor educators should suggest to these supervisors ways of creating opportunities for the performance of professional identity and narrative counselling practice. One way to prepare them would be to encourage supervisors to ask “What would a narrative approach suggest here?”; “How do your theories work to understand this action?”; or “How would your programme help you think about this?” These questions open space for the performance of knowledge, and the asking of it authenticates such knowledge as it positions student counsellors well.

2. I recommend that the New Zealand Association of Counsellors acknowledges the importance of supervisors and practitioners having matching paradigms when mandating supervision for its student and

provisional members who wish to become full members. I consider this to be crucial when those student and provisional members are learning a postmodern approach to counselling. Years of experience as a supervisor, or the required three-year minimum of full membership (NZAC, 2008) does not ipso facto mean that a supervisor with a modernist approach to supervision and counselling can provide “good enough” supervision to student counsellors learning a postmodern approach to counselling, despite their best intentions. Supervision cannot be assumed to provide “the maintenance and development of safe, ethical and effective practice” (NZAC, 2008, p. 1, clause 1.2) if there is no forum of acknowledgement for the counsellor through shared language and practice. As Carroll (1996, p. 48) writes, “supervision is the learning-by-doing, allowing [practitioners] to reflect on their work with clients in the presence of an experienced other who *enables* that reflection” (my emphasis). There might be no opportunity outside universities *other* than supervision for the performance of knowledge or professional identity for narrative counsellors. I believe that this makes the matching of paradigms between practitioner and supervisor essential.

3. Student counsellors in remote locations, or in locations where there are no supervisors with a narrative approach, need to be encouraged by university teachers to establish face-to-face relationships with narrative supervisors in other locations. Kandyce, Nicola and I all currently engage in supervision via Skype with practitioners outside Gisborne. We recognise that unless we had already formed face-to-face relationships with these practitioners, skyping for supervision with them might have been difficult. I wrote of these difficulties in Chapter Four.
4. I recommend that students set up peer groups to support each other’s learning; to provide a way to traverse the liminal phase of their rites of passage as they journey into taking up professional identities; and to provide a friendly forum for the co-construction, performance and audiencing of knowledge. The setting up of peer groups should be encouraged by university teachers. I believe that working in a peer group

would be of benefit to students of many different disciplines, regardless of the paradigms within which these disciplines sit.

Future directions

I think there is an urgent need for research into paradigm matching in supervision because of the difficulty encountered by students of postmodern counselling approaches when trying to thicken their identities as professional counsellors. The dominance of modernist approaches restricts possible forums for knowledge and identity performance.

Many questions formed in my thinking while I was writing this thesis. I hope that others will look for responses to them. I offer the questions here in the spirit of invitation to further research:

- Can the paradigms usefully be crossed in supervision when the supervisor has a modernist approach and the student counsellor a postmodern one? If so, what are the practices engaged in that would make this possible? I believe research into this topic is urgently needed.
- What advantages might be found when experienced postmodern counsellors consult supervisors with a modernist approach for supervision?
- What are the needs of student counsellors learning a modernist approach to counselling? Can these needs be met by supervisors with a postmodern approach to counselling?
- How long might counsellors with a postmodern approach to counselling want paradigm-matched supervision after finishing their training?

As Kandyce, Nicola and I look towards our professional futures, we know that our work together over the past few years has been of immense value to each of us. We formed our group in response to our particular circumstances – our geographical isolation, our distance from the university, the paradigm within which our counselling approach sits, and the absence of local resources to support that approach. We were hoping for help with our academic work and counselling skills, a place in which we could reflect on our professional practice. What we found in each other's company was all that, and so much more. We found a forum in which to perform our professional identities and knowledge, and have them

witnessed and authenticated. We found care, trust, encouragement, friendship, and aroha.

We continue to meet and act as audience to each other's stories - the stories of our lives and professional practices. In so doing, we continue to perform our professional identities, and have them authenticated. We are always becoming. We hope that others may find inspiration and value from our stories just as we have been inspired by the stories of others, particularly those of our clients. These stories of people's lives are the narratives that give us hope for our own lives and practices.

Appendix

Participant Consent Form

Research Study: A peer professional-learning group: Shaping professional identity and counselling practice collaboratively.

Please sign and return this form to Zoë Alford by the 15th of May, 2011. Please retain the second copy for your reference.

I am willing to participate in this exploration of the contribution of our peer professional learning group to my professional identity and practice.

I understand that the research question is: *What, and how, has this peer professional learning group contributed to its members' professional identity and practice?*

I have the information about the research that I need to make an informed decision about participation. We have discussed the research in our group, and I have had the opportunity to read the application that Zoë has made to the Faculty of Education's research ethics committee.

I consent to the electronic recording of the discussions between Zoë, our colleague and me.

I understand that I may refrain from responding to any of the questions asked of me, either when I am at the centre of the group, or as outsider witness. I understand that if any part of the process becomes uncomfortable for me, I may ask to take a break. If I hold concerns about what has been brought up, or the way questions have been asked during the course of our conversations, I can either address my concern with my colleagues at the time, or meet with my colleagues together or singly outside of the research meetings to make things right for me.

I understand that as researcher, Zoë has responsibility for safety within the group, and within the terms of the spirit of our group. I will share this responsibility with her.

I consent to any written or verbal correspondence being regarded as data for the research as long as I am informed that it might be, and that I have the opportunity to review it.

I give consent to the data generated in this research being used as part of Zoë's thesis. If Zoë wishes to use this data for subsequent publications, training and presentations, I understand that I will be consulted prior to the data being used. I will appraise her of any changes of address. I will discuss with Zoë any decision I might make to permanently withdraw my permission to use these data. The intention of this clause is for a collegial consultative approach to on-going dissemination in acknowledgement of the collegial nature of the group, and the contribution the three of us have made to the research.

I understand that the transcriptions of my recorded conversations will be jointly owned by me, our colleague, and Zoë. Recordings held by Zoë will be erased after the completion of the examination of Zoë's thesis. I will not use the transcriptions for any purpose until the research has been examined.

I understand that the University of Waikato regulations require the archiving of data collected for published research.

I understand that I can contact the research supervisor, Dr Kathie Crocket, at any time if I have concerns about any part of this research or my participation in it.

(Nicola only) Because Kathie is a teacher in HDCO545 and Nicola's university programme supervisor in the Counselling Practicum HDCO542, Associate Professor Wendy Drewery, Chair of Dept HDCO, has agreed to be available to hear and respond to any concerns that might arise for Nicola if the situation should arise where it becomes difficult for these to be addressed with the group, or with Kathie as supervisor of the project.

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