

## **A constructionist approach to supervision using a reflecting team**

### **Theoretical underpinnings**

Social constructionism is a philosophical stance that has its origins in post-modern thinking. Many researchers agree on the important aspects of social constructionism which include; the meandering and collective nature of meaning-making, valuing of many voices (and truths), and the importance of language (Hair & Fine, 2012; MacKay & Brown, 2013). It could be said that social constructionism supports the idea that there is no single truth, and through language and interaction with others, we make meaning.

How do we have supervisory conversations that are guided by social constructionist ideas? Philp et al (2007) suggest that a constructionist approach invites practitioners to engage in a collaborative relationship that encourages an exchange of ideas and co-construction of new meanings. It does not privilege any particular method, however, instead, offers a way of working that positions supervision itself as a social construction. This can create an opportunity to deconstruct frameworks and ideas (including supervisor and client roles, models of change, and sociocultural context).

### **Practice principles**

D’Arcy and Holmes (2021) outline some key principles and beliefs that shape the way we work with people that support a constructionist supervision approach. The principles include; transparency, collaboration, power- with, not power- over, respect, self-agency, and social justice. The beliefs that underpin a constructionist approach as defined by D’Arcy and Holmes (2021) were gleaned from Narrative Therapy and Strengths-Based Practice (McCashen, 2017). Assumptions include; the understanding that people are experts in their own lives, people have meaning-making skills, people have the skills, resources and capacity to change if they are clear on their preferred future, and the problem is the problem, the person is not the problem. And finally, the

acknowledgment that transparency and collaboration are critical elements. This provides a framework from which we can be guided within the constructionist approach. Consider the image of the supervisor and supervisee dancing artfully together as they navigate an uncertain and unique journey.

### **Reflecting team**

The reflecting team was developed by Tom Anderson in the 1980s when a group of therapists within a counselling session invited the family to listen to what the therapists were saying behind the mirror.

This began a process of discussions about discussions that supported new conversations (Anderson & Jensen, 2007). Tom Andersen believed "there is always more to see than one sees" (Anderson & Jensen, pp 10). Barbera Myerhoff 's study of Jewish Communities was the bridge into outsider witnessing and definitional ceremony that Michael White took into Narrative therapy. The idea of this being a ritual/ceremony of witnessing, by a community (reflecting team), of the client/supervisee's preferred identity, and how powerful this can be. The reflecting team provides reflections that are generated from a 'wondering stance', that provides the supervisee opportunity to make meaning through the hearing of what was said (Pender, 2012). An opportunity to offer avenues where meaning is developed between the listener and speaker. (Anderson and Jensen, 2007; White, 2005). Many agree that reflecting teams can be useful in providing clients with alternative perspectives. (Lowe & Guy 1996; Pender, 2012).

### **Reference List**

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