

Worth a Third Read: Six Readers Recall Articles from the *AJFT* and *ANZJFT*

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Six readers were asked to recall papers from earlier issues of this journal and to write briefly about what made these papers stand out in their minds. These readers have also been unable to resist the temptation to mention other papers which they would like to have had the time to discuss as well!

Moshe Lang: We live in a throwaway society; our economic well-being is dependent on obsolescence being built into what we produce. Family therapy is an integral part of this system, thus our theory and practice are fashion driven, yesterday's heroes are today's villains. Therefore the editors should be congratulated on their initiative in asking us to look back, examine some aspects of our past and consider what is particularly worth preserving.

I have been a reader of this Journal from the beginning. For me the request is particularly gratifying as it takes me back to the exciting heyday of family therapy when we were in our honeymoon. It is not coincidental that people with whom I had a very close involvement and whose work I was very familiar with, wrote both the articles I have chosen.

The first of the two articles is by Brian Stagoll (1981), titled 'Work Injuries and Invalidism in Migrant Families: A Systems View'. It deals with a very important social issue which family therapy on the whole overlooked then—and still does. It demonstrates how family therapy is not about family or therapy, but rather is a way of seeing and understanding. It describes the harsh work conditions in which chronic back injury occurs and the destructive medical/legal interaction which subsequently maintains and amplifies this condition.

But following the guidelines provided by the editors (if you choose two articles, then write about the one that was written earlier), my choice is **Bruce Tonge's 'We Thought it was a Secret! An Approach to Management of Emotional Disorder in Children with Parents**

in Marital Conflict' (*AJFT* 12: 50–56) subsequently retitled 'Draw a Dream—An Intervention Promoting Change in Families in Conflict', the title I prefer and continue to use. (It is interesting to note that both Brian's and Bruce's articles were included in Florence Kaslow's *The International Book of Family Therapy* in 1982, and that in such a short time after the inception of *The Australian Journal of Family Therapy*, no less than four articles of the 24 in Kaslow's volume were from this Journal.) Tonge described his projective technique:

I make a simple drawing of someone in bed with an associated large cartoon balloon. If the child's name is Bill, I will say as I draw the dream balloon, 'Here is a boy named Bill having a bad dream—perhaps it is even you. I wonder if you could draw that dream for me.' Many parents of children in conflict, which I have seen, have been enabled by the Draw a Dream technique to effectively communicate their distress and their perception of the family problem. Linking their dream drawing to real life events, such as their parents' quarreling, may help the child understand the meaning of their distressing feelings and behavior. This understanding often brings immediate relief. I then suggest, with the child's consent, that I show the dream drawing to the parents, as it may enable them to understand their child's feelings and problems. I give the child the choice of staying with me when I discuss the drawing . . . with the parents. This discussion may have a profound effect on the parents and has often acted to facilitate a change for the better in family life and relationships . . .

It could be argued that the therapist, by aligning himself with the child, may be inappropriately undermining the power of the parents in the family. This entrapment of the therapist into the family system is avoided if the therapist simply conveys the child's drawing and message to the parents as a go-between, emphasizing that it is their child's message to them as parents which therefore pushes the parents to take the responsibility for the implications of that message.

I like the simplicity, clarity and empathy with which the work is being described. 'Draw a Dream' can be used in a wide array of clinical situations. Family therapists are not particularly good communicators with children and

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therefore techniques which would enable them to improve their communication may be useful. Similarly, given the possibility of conflict between the parents and the power differential in the family, the fact that Tonge interviews the child by him/herself may be important. This possibility is overlooked by many therapists. Much more attention should be paid to anything that would facilitate a child's ability to communicate with the therapist. Of course, the wider the range of techniques at the disposal of the therapist, the more likely he is to have the right one available for the specific child in the specific situation.

The article further appeals to me because it combines psychiatry and psychodynamic psychotherapy with family therapy. Therefore it is close to my heart, because it parallels my struggles as a co-author of the Children's Depression Scale (Lang and Tisher, 1978; Tisher, Lang-Takac and Lang, 1982), a test which measures childhood depression, and is a useful instrument in facilitating the child's ability to communicate experiences that often remain hidden. Like Tonge I struggled to find a way of combining this work with my practice and thinking as a family therapist.

I think it was Gandhi who once observed that '... an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory'. Practise 'Draw a Dream'.

Audrey Jones: I have been reading the *ANZJFT* since the very beginning. When the editors first emailed me and asked me to contribute, there were many, many articles from which I could have chosen. But I immediately thought of an article by **Colleen Brown and Glenn Lerner: 'Every Dot has a Meaning'** I thought of a couple of other articles but kept coming back to 'Every Dot ...'

I have known Glenn for a long time and I met Colleen on one occasion when Glenn brought her to a meeting of the Illawarra Family Therapy Association (sadly no longer in existence). Colleen, who is a Koori, spoke of her work with Link-Up, an Aboriginal organisation founded in NSW in 1980 to help Aboriginal people 'taken away' to locate their families. She also brought with her some paintings by local Koori artists. I bought a painting by Reggie, one of the artists whose work was featured in the article, for my then one year old grandson. That painting still hangs on his bedroom wall. He is now ten.

I was deeply moved and very sad and ashamed on hearing the stories Colleen told the members of the Illawarra Family Therapy Association about what had happened to so many Aboriginal children.

So when my copy of the Journal (13, 4, December 1992) arrived I was delighted to see an article (175–184) by Glenn and Colleen and it was with much interest that I started to read. Glenn and Colleen invited readers to share the 'inner spiritual struggle of Eileen and Reggie', the two Koori artists whose paintings are featured in the article, as 'they come to terms with their Aboriginality through their art'.

Also in the article were poems which had been published by Edwards and Read (1989) in *The Lost Children*, and more Link-Up stories, and I was deeply moved by the enormity of the emotional suffering of the 'lost children' themselves, their mothers and their fathers, their siblings

and their extended families. Again I was overcome by great sadness and it was a shaming thought to realise that we all are responsible for what John Pilger, in his book *A Secret Country*, called the 'secret oppressive racial practices in Australian society' (quoted in the article, p.176), which led to the incarceration of Aboriginal children in white foster homes and institutions.

And yet the article is positive in its looking at ways we can move forward. There is the suggestion that

... what may be required is not a Western technology for change, but simply a desire to listen. To come to the Koori meeting place, not as teachers or therapists, but as Australians willing to hear of the experiences of another culture ... Link-Up stories remind us not to aggrandise the theory and practice of family therapy, but to look for the 'heroic' at the most basic level of human living ... Where there is despair there may be hope, instead of alienation a sense of community, spirituality in place of a selfish Western consumerism, perhaps a new-old dreaming to replace television.

But perhaps the most moving part of the article were the transcripts of videotaped interviews with the artists as they painted. Much of the interviewing was done by the photographer, Tom Vogel, in a most empathic, sensitive way. With gentle curiosity, he asked Eileen, 'The dots in the painting—what do they symbolise for you?' She replied '... A symbol of life, the beginning of life and this is going around and around ...' The top of the head in the painting which she called 'Breaking Out' represented her upbringing in a children's home. A broad border across the middle of a question mark which spanned the painting from top to bottom divided her old life from her new life when she was reunited with her people at an Aboriginal camp site. She said, 'I know who I belong to now'.

And Eileen had a message for counsellors: '... Just try to understand ... just listen to them and try to understand.'

Reggie's painting was called 'The Clear Blood Centre'. He said that his painting was about the Aboriginal culture and the white culture. Reggie talked of his painting starting in the institution where he was as a child. He said that the staff at the home influenced him a lot in the white ways but that they had tried to balance this by also showing the Aboriginal culture. His painting consisted of a jagged cross across the middle of the painting representing the Christianity which was taught in the home. He explained that the jaggedness of the cross also represented 'the highs and lows as I've gone through life, my ups and downs, my feelings about people, things I've said and thought, and all of that goes into the lines, into the jaggedness'. Under the cross were the curved red blood lines joining his Aboriginal family. He said 'Even though we're separated, we're all connected in the blood and we're all together in the blood ... hopefully one day, we'll come together again'.

In concluding, Colleen and Glenn said very movingly:

We have heard from a young man and woman of the 'stolen generation'. They have shared the intimate details of their suffering in return for our willingness to listen and to try to understand ... Their work and words to us are an inspiration to all who have suffered like them. By simply listening

we have empowered them to speak and they through their paintings have invited us to sit with them as family at the Koori camp site'.

Our Governor-General, Sir William Deane, has aptly called what happened to the stolen generation 'our legacy of unutterable shame'. 'Every Dot has a Meaning' reflects this statement, but on reading the article, we are left with a feeling of hope of reconciliation. We therapists can help if we 'listen and try to understand'.

Sarah Calvert: When asked to think of one article from the Journal which I continue to use and refer others to, this article came instantly to mind: **Sue Nicholson's 'The Narrative Dance—A Practice Map for White's Therapy'**. (*ANZJFT* 16, 1: 23–28) The work of White and Epston (and now their colleague Johnella Bird) has become a significant tool in the therapist workbook around the world but it has been best and most easily learnt by watching the developers themselves 'at work'. Reading them (with the exception of Bird) is not always easy, as their language is dense and filled with the notions of the postmodern.

This article was the first I had seen which provided a 'map' with which to practise and perfect the ways in which these therapists use narrative to move a client from an 'old story' to a 'new narrative'. It provided a clear perspective on the use of past, present and future woven into the new 'story' of the client. Of particular help are the Tables, the 'Dance Floors' provided as a part of the text. These are a visual explanation of the key concepts of this work—deconstruction of the dominant story, reconstruction of the preferred story—and a table which shows us the 'dance' as it moves across the 'floor' of therapy. They enable us to 'see the work' in three dimensions. The self of the client, the relationship in therapy, the wider environment/society: all have positions on the 'dance floor'. These are positions which the therapist needs to attend to and think about in framing questions.

The article is not just conceptually easy to follow, it is practical. Some of the Tables provide actual questions so that a reader can see how the concepts are developed within the work. These run alongside a text which provides clinical vignettes. In a way, the article is like the metaphor it describes: it too moves fluidly across the landscape of the work. It also reminds us that 'the map is not the territory', that therapy is an interactive, relational space, something that cannot be reduced to words and pictures on a printed page.

Catherine Sanders: What makes an event memorable? What makes one paper, out of all those published in this journal since 1979, the one that the mind reaches to when asked the question 'what article sticks in your memory the most'? Memory, we know, is enhanced by a number of factors. Matters which are accompanied by strong affect remain more vivid than those that leave us unmoved. Events that are highly relevant and carry important meanings etch themselves deeper, and repetition is the time-honoured means for embedding memory.

Each of these factors applies to my instant choice of **Carmel Flaskas' 'Thinking about the Emotional Interaction of Therapist and Family'** (*ANZJFT* 10, 1: 1–6). I still recall my first reading. I had recently returned from North America and a culture where affect (particularly anger) was readily and volubly expressed. Such behaviour was foreign to me both personally and culturally, Australians being somewhat more restrained in this regard, and I recall feeling overwhelmed and disoriented. My supervisor recognised the same thing and wisely advised that I 'learn to deal with affect'. The advice stopped there. She appeared to know what that meant; I didn't. It was in this context that I encountered Carmel's paper; now I had a framework for beginning to make sense, not only of my client's responses, but also my own. Here was a paper that fearlessly spoke in a coherent, intelligent and eminently sensible way, of matters that family therapy had neatly sidestepped.

Yet it was not only the personal affective meaning of the paper that locked it into my memory. This paper brought together ideas that have proved central to the unfolding of family therapy, both here and abroad. Flaskas was one of the first authors to introduce the idea that concepts from analytic therapy could usefully occupy a place in systemic therapy, a notion used extensively and intelligently by Paul Gibney, and the subject of a whole issue of the British *Journal of Family Therapy* in 1997. In addition, she heralded her own interest in the therapeutic relationship, locating it in a systemic frame. This would come to fruition in the publication of *The Therapeutic Relationship in Systemic Therapy*, a collection of papers by Australian authors which Carmel co-edited with Amaryll Perlesz. She also moved effortlessly between the personal and intellectual, giving voice to a particularly female way of knowing and writing. This too would become a major strand of thought and debate in the field.

Finally, there is the factor of repetition. This is a paper to which I have returned repeatedly. It has provided clarity where my vision has been clouded by affect, and the use of the analytic concepts of transference, counter-transference and projective identification have proved invaluable. In our training at Bower Place, it has been a key article since its publication.

In reading, I am again touched by the tone of the paper. Here writes one of Australia's most talented family therapists. With immense clarity, she presents her material with humour, humanity and humility, qualities that define the good therapist. In the end it is the emotional connection that makes it memorable.

Julie Burgess: I have been exploring the journal for some ten years now. At first it was my introduction to social constructionism and encouraged my vision for a career in family therapy. Later, while training in London, I used the journal to remember and reconnect with my home. The track to the *ANZJFT* shelf in the library was worn thin as I waded carefully through each edition. Now, a few years later, I have the task of choosing an article that has influenced me, to expound upon. Naturally, my first inclination was to turn to those years in

which the journal was part of my 'secure base'. Unfortunately, the stack of journals in my workplace is missing those crucial issues. I can't even complain to the librarian, as I am she!

Once over my initial sense of dislocation, it was easy to find another article that has had an impact on me. I chose **'Adult Attachment: Some Considerations for Family Therapy'** by Marija Radojevic, (*ANZJFT* 17, 1: 33–41) as it is very pertinent in my work life at present. It has allowed me as a family therapist to examine the place of more psychodynamic and individual frameworks within my work.

For my team at CAFS in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, attachment theory and therapy has been the subject of much recent analysis. We have begun to use it with kids who return to the service again and again, tailoring a package that works specifically with the attachment relationship within the mother–child dyad.

This therapy has had such effective results here that I began to think that maybe I should start to learn more about it(!). However, having once been accused by a tutor of being a 'purist' in family therapy, I was a little puzzled about how to integrate this seemingly individual, psychodynamically oriented framework into the rigidity of my systems thinking. It was then that I stumbled over Marija's article again. At first it was like news of difference. It encouraged me to think about the connections between the two frameworks, rather than the differences.

This thinking journey is still evolving, in fact there have been several rewrites of this piece as my ideas change. But at present, two issues stand out for me. Marija proposed the idea that attachment and family therapy both assume that 'the individual cannot be understood adequately outside of the context of social relationships' (33). In attachment theory, individuals are understood by elucidating their model of attachment within the mother–child subsystem. Although this model is located internally, it is 'outworked' or enacted externally within the relationship. It becomes defining of the relationship. The likelihood of transmitting the same kind of attachment model transgenerationally is 70%.

In systems theory, we consider the individual as part of many systems which develop patterns of interacting to maintain themselves. Within these systems, individuals have specific roles and rules predicated on generational beliefs and structures. These roles and rules have a defining effect on behaviour and relationships, just as the internal working models of attachment theory do. This similarity seems too simple to be remarked upon, yet it was the obvious simple disparity between the two frameworks that set me upon this journey.

Another 'conceptual similarity' I have discovered along the way is that of looking for 'mistakes in meaning' made by the child within the dyad. Within attachment theory this technique acts to neutralise the adverse affect of a negatively perceived event within the relationship. Within family therapy we might call it reframing or double description—the reworking of perceptions to allow a new meaning to emerge, and therefore make change a possibility.

So there is my journey. I can now tolerate the intrusion of psychodynamic and individual thinking within my purist family therapy framework, as it is no longer an intrusion. I am encouraged to be less of a purist and more of a collaborator!

Ian Goldsmith: SEX SEX SEX SEX SEX SEX SEX. My choice of paper was easy! **Penny Roughan and Alan Jenkins' 'A Systems-Developmental Approach to Counselling Couples with Sexual Problems'** (11, 3: 129–139 and 11, 4: 193–201) are favourites. Why? Because they are about SEX! (No, Ian, you cannot say that, people will think you have a perversion or something, or worse still that you have a problem. Remember, therapists don't have problems, they are well balanced people in all areas of their life!)

Well, I did like them because they are about SEX, and much more. Penny and Alan, in these two articles, have written about a topic area which is only occasionally addressed in papers about working with couples. Check the journal. Sure, 'relationship dynamics' are discussed, 'intimacy' is visited, 'attachment' is outlined, 'gender' is often in the text, but what about SEX? Not much in this Journal. An outsider could be forgiven for thinking that this is not a legitimate issue for therapists. Yet it is!!

I do not know whether couples reflect our, my, hesitancy to talk directly about their sexual relationship or whether we, I, reflect their awkwardness in raising it. Yet it is, I believe, a topic that couples do want their therapist to be able to competently help them discuss. Popular magazines know there is a quest for knowledge about sex. Find one that does *not* include sex in at least one of its articles.

Penny and Alan's papers have been significant to me for offering a set of ideas and directions to take with couples who want to talk about SEX. (Or, if this is too indelicate, 'address their intimacy needs'.) They very clearly examine sexual difficulty within the context of common relationship patterns. Penny and Alan's choice of case material brings these patterns alive. Their case examples are so good, I am inclined to think they must have seen some of the couples I struggled with. What is best, however, is the chance to be ringside to the therapy. Their second paper in particular, exposes how they do it.

But Penny and Alan's papers are more than how to work with sexual difficulty, they are a concrete example of strategic thinking. I may be more limited than most, but I know I need to work hard to keep my thinking from being seduced into linear comfortableness. To do this I need to see, read, hear the live examples of other therapists actually doing, rather than theorising about, their work. I have been a subscriber to the Journal for thirteen years and a reader for longer. When I sense I am getting stale, it is to Penny and Alan's papers that I turn to stimulate and re-arouse my awareness of how to think 'outside the double bed square'.

Reference

Stagoll, B., 1981. Work Injuries and Invalidism in Migrant Families: A Systems View, *AJFT* 2, 2: 63–75.