

Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology. Vol 8, 2008, pp 103- 113

Affective Anomia: an Interventional Focus for Attachment Disorder

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"What we have here is a failure to communicate,"
 (from *Cool Hand Luke*, 1967)

ABSTRACT

It has been proposed that social disconnectedness at school age can stem from early unsatisfactory attachment experiences. This interpretation leads to the somewhat diffuse label "Attachment Disorder" (AD) however there exist few school-relevant interventions for the various forms of AD. A new perspective (King and Newnham, 2008) with more promising avenues for intervention has proposed that:

- a. AD be seen as instances of the failure to (thus far) master the fundamental socio-developmental level of Basic Trust described by Erikson and by Blos.
- b. The failure to experience and to master Basic Trust goes hand in hand with an inadequate ability to identify and predict emotional responses of others – this deficit being precisely linked with the social/behavioural deficits which are described as AD.
- c. By school age, deficient Basic Trust may be appropriately strengthened by acquiring the capacity to anticipate other people's affective responses – that is, Affective Empathy (AE).
- d. School relevant interventions for a range of resistant social and behavioural problems may be based upon improving AE.

Building upon this interpretation and applying the communication model of Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) a short class-based intervention was designed with overt goal of more exciting and interesting story writing skills to help all students, and the covert goal of improved Affective Empathy. Testing the hypothesis that AE can be changed, in a pilot study of three one hour lessons held at 2-week intervals, a group of 7 students, mean age 10y11m, found significantly improved their scores on the test of AE.

INTRODUCTION

A failure to achieve a high level of communication at the emotional level is a strong predictor of social dysfunction. Speaking specifically to the adjustment difficulties observed in school-age children, an amalgam of developmental models has recently proposed (King & Newnham, 2008) that the problems subsumed under various versions of the label Attachment Disorder (AD) can be usefully interpreted as, firstly, deriving from inadequate mastery of an early infancy task (Erikson's stage of Basic Trust [1963]), and secondly, illustrating Arsenio's (1988) description of the attribution of

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inappropriate or unlikely emotional responses to people involved in affect-rich situations. Thus, King and Newnham have assembled historical and current literature support for the notion that social maladjustment and behavioural anomalies can:

(a) be interpreted as a failure to master Basic Trust, following on from maladaptive early bonding experiences (offering a different perspective, but remaining compatible with Attachment Disorder models),
and

(b) be taken to suggest that, for children with social/behavioural difficulties, a co-existing feature (arguably a key maintaining factor) is the inability to correctly name appropriate or likely emotional situational responses.

From the position that later-age maladaptive social behaviours can be a sequel to unsatisfactory early attachment experiences, the school-age focus should logically be upon factors which *maintain* current problem behaviours rather than upon retrogressive attempts to restore a putative insufficiency of hugs. Developmental psychology points to the interpretation that, if not actually maintained by, these problems are at least marked by the vector which could be labeled *Affective Anomia* (the inability to correctly label or ascribe affective responses) and its behavioural and social corollary – an impoverished level of Affective Empathy (AE). The suggestion that students may have better social skills if they understood how people feel is scarcely provocative. Decades of studies from around the late 1980s (eg Arsenio, 1988) have shown a coherent thread linking maladaptive socio-moral behaviour with Affective Anomia, while parallel studies have described much the same gamut of behaviours and attitudes as patho-nemonic of AD. Recent interpretations (King & Newnham, 2008) have linked this array of empirical observations with the foundation principal of Basic Trust.

The present paper pursues the proposition that, if a classroom program could be formulated to improve AE (the naming appropriate emotional responses measured for the present pilot study by a newly-developed test), then such a program may be a valuable tool in augmenting the school-age development of Basic Trust and at the same time the anticipated program may ameliorate the lingering symptoms of long-since unsatisfactory attachment experiences. The benefit of this line of reasoning is that it leads to a simple model of intervention: *we should teach the students to recognize how other people feel.*

The most straightforward pedagogical mode of “teaching” something is to *tell* students about it. This “telling about it” could translate into a lesson or two (or perhaps a program delivered by a visiting welfare professional) devoted to “understanding how other people feel”. In an ideal world the students with under-developed AE would leave these classes saying “ah ha, so that is what makes other people feel sad/happy/angry etc – I must remember that. I must work on developing my understanding of other people’s feelings!” However the world of teaching is not ideal², and even well delivered lessons which tell “how to do it” may not result in behaviour change. Whilst not necessarily a formal curriculum component, didactic advice on the subject of AE has been a ubiquitous and continuing thread of each child’s home and school experience: “that makes me angry”; “I am happy about this”; “your disruptive behaviour is very annoying (to me)”; “you must respect how other people feel”. Any and every student could mimic these lines but the fact of familiarity betrays impotence. Despite years of “telling” we have stark examples of deficient AE evident in the school yard and a corresponding literature which establishes the fact of socially maladjusted students who display Affective Anomia. Pedagogy has, on balance, failed to communicate – where true “communication” is defined as the outcome of a shared perspective on the target topic. To explain communication failure on such an important, such a well emphasized and omnipresent topic as other

² **Non-ideal responses to a well delivered lesson:** a recent report describes the dismay of teachers who departed from a professional development course confidently armed with new and effective ways of managing bad behaviour (evidently a course which featured high *face validity*): *Paradoxically, teachers’ high satisfaction with the PD did not result in significant changes in their application of behaviour management strategies and did not reduce their ratings of problem behaviour for the most difficult students* (Giallo & Hayes, 2007, p 115)

people's feelings, it is necessary to articulate a model of communication and then to postulate the presence of major barriers to incoming information.

Communication through Shared Images

The process of communication is central to Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) (Bormann, 1985) which formalizes the idea that people are best able to connect with others when there is a sharing of relevant mental imagery or *Fantasies*: "SCT . . . [describes] . . . the existence of the communicative force of fantasy . . . (Shields, 2000, p 397), ". . . fantasy, visibly present in the stuff we call communication" (Bormann et al, 2003, p 368). And developing the notion that affective communication hinges upon appropriately shared images ("fantasies"):

. . . the sharing of group fantasies . . . brings about a convergence of **appropriate feelings** . . . when (group) members . . . share a fantasy they jointly **experience the same emotions** . . . (Bormann 1985, pp130-131, emphasis added) . . . and (the shared imagery and emotions) produces reliable predictions of human behaviour (Bormann et. al., 2003, p 369).

Thus, Bormann's SCT suggests that fluent communication is facilitated by the medium of shared fantasies and that communication failure is more likely in the absence of shared images.

Traditionally methods of creating shared imagery involved social story-telling: "social storytellers who share fantasies and thus . . . create social realities" (Bormann, 1985, p 136). In Australia over the last 40,000 years Aboriginal culture refined the process of communicating the rules and expectations of their society using mythical stories as a way of sharing cultural law through fantasy and through images of animals: "Sharing (stories) is the Aboriginal way" (Djugurba, 1974). It is now recognised that these stories provide insights into Aboriginal thinking and actions, in relation to other human beings (Berndt & Berndt, 1989). A similar blending of story telling with social education is found in western society where stories are populated with "Animal symbols . . . fabulous creatures ... impossible hybrids or fanciful renderings of existing beings..." (Wooton, 1986). More recently, Johansen (2005) described the need for familiar stories as a means of facilitating communication and overcoming barriers.

. . . when working with clients of the Islamic faith, clinicians can benefit from being familiar with passages of the Koran . . . knowledge of these stories [stories from the Koran] . . . will likely lead to a more understanding, collaborative, and trusting relationship between the therapist and client. (Johansen, 2005, pp 177- 183)

Although the pivotal role of a leader or guide is common Gilbert (1989) described the use of communal story telling as a means of guiding members of a group develop a new shared guiding image: by telling and re-telling the story until an acceptable shared fantasy is achieved. This process of group involvement in the story telling is an important, but under-emphasized image creating tool: not only listening to social stories, not only being guided by a mentor or therapist, but also the peer-level telling of socially acceptable versions of the underlying stories, and receiving supportive or critical feedback from peers or elders, has always been a technique in development and normalization of each person's guiding fantasy.

Bormann's (1985) Symbolic Convergence model compellingly predicts that communication and emotional coherence will flourish in the presence of shared internal images. By highlighting the conditions which facilitate the sharing of ideas, his model infers that since communication is not always optimal, the failure may not be due to a passive absence of shared images: more than this, there may be factors which actively maintain barriers to communication.

Barriers to Communication

Long before Bormann, from the time of Shakespeare, observers of human society have recognised that there are barriers to communication and that the "telling of facts" does not lead to sharing of ideas: "*Bacon insists that reasoned arguments are, in themselves, dreadfully boring, and that outside of mere reportage (as in the communication of scientific discovery), arguments are always in need of 'lively representation'*" (cited Gunn, 2003, pp 46-7).

The barriers to receiving new factual knowledge are not instantly evident. Although the reverse seems true, the human perceptual processes do not perform like a microphone or television camera: the outside world is not projected faithfully upon some internal screen and all we need to do is to attend to that information in order to make an internal representation of the outside world. The attention-demanding status of being “ready to receive” information has a mirror-image: as if designed to defend against incoming information, more than merely not attending to the information, there can be attentional-intensive barriers to communication. Bormann (1985) proposed that incoming information is carefully filtered and compared to the profile of our personal Guiding Fantasy. The attentional demands of this filtering process can be the key to its weakness: to overcome this barrier to communication, it is necessary to harness the aroused attention that the Listener uses to defend his/her Guiding Fantasy. Thus, Bormann’s SCT theory provides a model of communication (sharing of fantasies or images), a defensive barrier to communication (attentional resources defending the Guiding Fantasy), and implicitly a means of by-passing the defenses by trapping the defensive attention.

Attention Trapping

The process of attention trapping and implanting of new images has been formally studied since the early days of mesmerism. Indirect methods of communication are essentially methods of dealing with the fully conscious and aware Listener, of distracting attention and of introducing new images. The diversionary approach to image sharing (Zamansky & Clark, 1986) provides a means of sidestepping attention-demanding barriers, thus leaving the Listener with un-defended access to the new images (Woolson, 1986) which are provided by the skilled image-creating guide.

Two attention trapping techniques which may be potentially useful in the classroom are:

1. *A distraction topic* to cause the Listener’s attention to focus elsewhere – readily recognised in the physical case of the pickpocket who bumps into your shoulder harshly (the distraction stimulus) while gently relieving your hip pocket of your wallet (the un-noticed intrusion into your personal, physical space). In a similar vein various therapeutic “thought stopping” or “mindfulness” approaches in therapy seek to focus conscious attention onto this or that nominated topic (including the distracting process of trying to focus on the topic of “not focusing on the target topic”). Under the distraction model, most of the person’s conscious attention is absorbed while thinking of one thing (where “thinking of . . .” is the conscious equivalent to our target mental behaviour of “focusing attention onto. . .”) and the insurgent images can be introduced unchallenged.
2. *An absorption task* which in this case is the task of seeking answers to questions. Answer-seeking is highly absorbing of attention, and the degree of attention absorption increases when the questions are ambivalent or open ended. Even more attention is absorbed when the Listener is coaxed into the contemplation of a “meaningful mystery” wherein the questions themselves must be formed by the Listener. By encouraging and shaping (rather than imposing) the questions which form in the Listener’s mind, (the “meaningful mystery”) generates the unhindered flow of images which relate to the Listener’s own question³. This flow of thought and image may produce ideas which differ from the already-present mental set or “Guiding Fantasy”. This Listener-generated direction is what Green (1989) refers to as the “meaning” of the dialogue while the “mystery” component is manifest in the vagueness or by ambiguity of the seeding process.

³ Adding empirically-grounded support to this point, precisely these same attention-absorbing intellectual mechanics have been described for clients trying to make sense of the ambiguous Rorschach figures. Exner explains that, when a client is viewing one of the ink-blot plates and asked “what this might be”, a large number of candidate responses occur to the observer and a great deal of filtering (an attentional demanding task) occurs as the viewer sifts through the array of responses: “almost all people find it easy to form several potential answers to each figure . . . The task is not really finding possible answers, but deciding which of the potential answers available to select . . . Most of the time devoted to the Response Phase of the test is devoted to this issue . . . [and refusal to respond to one of the more complex Rorschach cards] suggests that he or she is having difficulty in the discarding and selection components of the response process” (Exner, 2003, p 51- 55)

Developing an Intervention.

Emerging from communication theory is a method for “teaching” Affective Empathy. The developing model of intervention suggests:

- Students in our schools differ from each other along an implied social-affective continuum, illustrated by ability to “appropriately” name the feelings of others in challenging situations. One nominated cause of poorer or delayed development in this domain is faulty attachment experiences which have served to attenuate the development of Basic Trust.
- These students would be helped by a course which would “teach” them how to better understand the feelings of others.
- The fact of delayed development in this domain pre-supposes that these students are resistant to being “told” about the need to understand other people’s feelings. They are resistant to communication on this topic.
- Symbolic Convergence Theory elucidates the need for shared internal images (fantasies) in order achieve high grade communication, and SCT implies the existence of barriers to communication when imagery is not shared.
- Models of attention, distraction, and image provide a set of tools for guiding the development of new images, and sidestepping the barriers of defensive attention.

The three tools derived from diverse branches of communication theory and which form the basis of the proposed intervention are:

1. Devising a distraction topic;
2. Leading the Listener to create (to imagine) answers to questions, particularly to open-ended questions, and particularly to open-ended questions which the Listener has himself/herself generated (according to the limitations set by the Guide);
3. Involving the Listener as a story-teller, using peer support and criticism to shape internal imaging process towards the target of affective orthodoxy.

As operational exemplars of the above three mechanisms, we have:

1. The *distraction* component of the intervention being involvement in a *story writing class* where the nominated goal is to “make our story writing more interesting”, but no mention of developing the students’ level of Affective Empathy.
2. The *absorption process* is to require the students to ask, within the context of a story writing exercise⁴, what are the outwardly observable and the internally experienced characteristics of a particular feeling. And deepening the level of *attention absorption*, is the exercise which requires that the students make their stories “more interesting” by describing and naming them directly, or alternatively by implying feelings but not by naming them.
3. The *peer-supported* (peer modified) *story telling* component is achieved by students reading their stories. Then as each class member reads out a sample story, the others must guess at the name of the implied feeling discussing why or why not that feeling is evident in the story, thus satisfying the historically established social-norming process of story telling with peer revision, and the possibility of occasional elder (teacher) revision (need another word for “revision” here) or approval. Obtaining, and giving feedback regarding the clarity of an implied feeling, including the identity or name of the feeling, and the appropriateness of the feeling - all within the guise of making the stories more interesting.

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⁴ story writing: typically the “stories” are just the beginning of what could become a full story, being just a single sentence or an opening paragraph stimulated by a picture. The overt goal is to *make the story interesting* such that the other students would like to read (hear) more. The process of asking for just the first sentence makes the program suitable for students of impoverished literacy skills, but the oral format has not yet been trialled.

of occasional elder (teacher) revision (need another word for “revision” here) or approval. The full program in lesson-format is available from the authors.

To this point it is suggested that AE is a quality which is “learned” but that individuals will have reached different levels due to different developmental experiences. It is further suggested that AE is likely not “learned” by a process of “telling”, but in line with Bormann’s SCT if an image sharing scenario is created, then learning may occur. Combined with the applicable components of the historically justified process of story telling among peers, these tools have been assembled to a prospective group-based intervention

The hypothesis under test is that a group of students will increase in their measured levels of AE following a series of lessons which aim to bypass defensive filtering and which match the criteria for the communication and new image formation.

METHOD

Participants

Seven students (4 females 3 male) were selected from year 5 and 6 according to the following criteria: about average or better in curriculum (literacy) skills; no manifest behavioural or emotional problems; agreed to participate in a “story writing” course run by a visiting professional (one of the authors, working under his professional registration as a teacher).

Student ages ranged from 10 years and 2 months to 11 years and 7 months. The mean average age was 10 years and 11 months.

Materials

Pre-test and post-test of Affective Empathy was by a 6 item test derived on the published notion that naming “appropriate” emotions is a skill which can have a range from “poor” to “strong”. Short vignettes were given and the students were required to select from a list of 48 mood adjectives the best word describing how a participant in the story would feel. A focus group consisting of teachers and psychologists had reached consensus on the three point scoring system (zero = inappropriate and unlikely; 1 = “possible emotional response” but showing little understanding of other people’s feelings; 2 = “better empathy with other people”; 3 = “superior level of emotional empathy”).

The story writing course was delivered as a three-lesson package, delivered for one hour once per week where the students would write short paragraphs according to story-seeding instructions and then peer-rate these paragraphs as “interesting”.

Each week focussed on a different way of “how to make stories interesting”, with a new “interest-developing tool” being taught each lesson. Underlying the idea of developing interest in a story was the idea that people are more interested in a story if they “know” how the story characters feel. As an example a picture of a child looking at a broken cup might be used as a stimulus. “Mary had broken the cup” would receive no marks for “interesting”, while a story which hinted at emotion (“Mary’s face was wet with tears as she stared at the broken cup”) would be ranked higher. Thus students were instructed to firstly decide on an emotion, and then describe it or hint at it, with peer-review to indicate if their intentions were recognised all the time maintaining the apparent focus upon the “interest level” of the story.

RESULTS

The results of paired pre and post measures on the affective empathy scale are presented in Table 1 with the paired differences significant in the predicted direction. Table 2 shows the pre- and post-course measures compared to population parameters (from unselected year 6 students across a range of metropolitan and regional primary schools). The pre-course scores were indistinguishable from general population scores while post-course AE measures were significantly higher.

Table 1: Difference in Affective Empathy Scale score at Pre- and Post-Intervention

Students	pre-course AE	post-course AE	difference (post- pre) AE
1	7	8	1
2	6	8	2
3	10	13	3
4	6	8	2
5	8	10	2
6	8	7	-1
7	6	13	7
mean	7.28	9.57	2.28
SD	1.5	2.5	

Note: Difference (showing improvement in AE over the duration of the course) is significant at $p < 0.025$ (Wilcoxin's paired rank test).

Table 2: Pre- and post- intervention scores compared to population values

Sample	Mean	SD	N of test Items	N of cases	Directional hypothesis	<i>p</i> (t-test)
Cumulated, no treatment	6.658	3.3729	6	234		
Pre-test	7.28	1.5	6	7	Two tail	ns
Post test	9.57	2.5	6	7	One tail	< 0.025*

* $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

The present series of papers (see King & Newnham, 2008) has accepted the position that a range of social difficulties, often subsumed under the causal label of “attachment disorders” can be fruitfully linked to the developmentally-founded problem of Affective Anomia. This proposal leads to the expectation that “teaching” students about emotions (developing Affective Empathy) will lead to greater social skills. However both communication theory and life experience suggests that it is difficult to teach students a new interpersonal perspective, where “teaching” in this context refers to the process of endowing the target students with a new internal model of recognising other people's feelings. Accordingly, the program developed for the present study derives from Bormann's (1985) Symbolic Convergence theory and is linked to role of defensive attention in image-communication. From this theoretical perspective, the purpose of the paper was to explain how the proposed “problem” (poorly developed Affective Empathy) can become the focus of an intervention program based upon communication theory. Illustrating a practical instance of this intervention model, a pilot study is presented with promising outcomes. The present paper describes a class-deliverable program which may lead to improved naming of emotions. Furthermore, given that the overt goal of the program is improved story writing in an orthodox literacy program sense, the program is class, or curriculum-relevant.

It was anticipated that, prior to intervention, a pilot group of students should have an Affective Empathy (AE) mean score which was indistinguishable from the general population, while post test an increase in AE was predicted. That is, the pilot group of students should increase in AE following a

course which satisfied Bormann's criteria for an Image Communicating effect. The program was presented as a story writing program to complement the normal literacy program in a primary school. Since Affective Anomia is reported to exist among students with socio-behavioural difficulties, and is anticipated to exist more as a continuum rather than a dichotomous quality, then this program of enhancing the appropriate recognition of emotional responses is seen as a tangible step forward in literacy skills as well as social skills for all students. In this case the "new image" to be communicated was an improved understanding of other people's feelings, and this "understanding" was operationally defined by a six item test asking students to ascribe feelings to people in conflicting or ambiguous situations. The test had been previously normed on 234 students aged 10 to 12 years across a range of city and provincial schools.

Both hypotheses were supported with pre-program mean scores being similar to the general population data (two tailed t-test, no significant difference), and the post-test data (predicting an increase in Affective Empathy) showing 1-tailed significance exceeding $p = 0.025$ (t-test, and Wilcoxin's paired rank comparison). The pilot group of students were "general" students, not selected for specific social or behavioural difficulties. Future work will explore the benefits of the program for the target candidate students – that is those manifestly suffering from Affective Anomia, as signified by various social problems indicated, for example, by elevated scores on Achenbach's Child Behaviour Checklist), but also confirmed by low pre-intervention measure of AE.

Affective Empathy and Emotional Quotient.

Relevant to any proposed method of improving social and emotional functioning is the general (and specific) domain of Emotional Quotient (otherwise termed Emotional Intelligence). The quality Affective Empathy underlying the presently-presented intervention focuses upon the high grade anticipation of emotional responses in others and it is anticipated that improved AE will result in improved social functioning. This link is not new, nor controversial: *accurately perceiving a person's emotions facilitates the prediction and understanding of that person's subsequent actions* (Brackett et al., 2006, p 780). The present study could therefore be accommodated under the general heading of Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Brackett et al., 2006), which presents the notion of a measurable, chronologically developing, and therefore age-proportional quantity which may be akin to the standardized forms of intelligence measurement (IQ).

EI is a broad notion covering several aspects of emotional functioning, but which to some extent purports to be like intelligence and hence a *latent or potential* capacity to perform at a given level (which might be assessed as the *capacity* or level of intellectual *readiness* to cope with formal mathematical reasoning) as distinct to an *achievement* (which would be indicated by *achievement or mastery* over curriculum components of the mathematics course). EI is defined as "the ability to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions" (Brackett et al., 2006, p 780), and the "emotional recognition" component of EI is defined as "an individual's ability to apply a single word emotion to a particular [representation of a] facial expression" (Tracy, Robins, & Lagattuta, 2005, p 251). The measurement is achieved by showing pictures of faces which depict universally agreed-upon representations of various emotions.

By comparison the present study of Affective Empathy (AE) focuses not merely upon "recognition" (matching an emotional label to a line drawing of faces or other stimuli) but rather the capacity (would you prefer to use "latent trait" rather than "capacity" this being a technical term which was at least once beloved by edu-measure people and roughly does mean what we are talking about – that is the "not see-able thing" which underlies the measurement) which underpins the construct of AE is the dynamic, real-world anticipation of another's emotional response in an affect-rich situation. This quality is a compound skill requiring first the understanding of a range of emotions (where "understanding" is operationally defined as the ability to name both internal and external aspects of the target emotion, as well as the ability to distinguish between different shades of similar feelings) as well as the empathic ability to correctly anticipate another's feelings in a given situation, and finally to be able to distinguish along the spectrum of *most acceptable to least acceptable*, through to *not likely at all*. Thus the present quality of AE is at once a credible companion of the broad school of EI, but is more specific and more targeted, and more dynamic version of the "recognition" component of EI.

The Story Telling Intervention and Narrative Therapy – are they the same?

Narrative Therapy (NT) does involve therapeutic change (improved socio or affective functioning) via the process of story telling. The presently proposed intervention similarly anticipated social benefits (therapeutic change) via a program based upon story writing. This apparent overlap raises the question, *Is the present intervention nothing more than NT?* First, to define NT: the process of telling one's own story (or the story of one's family, especially when it has been a dysfunctional history) and making sense (constructing a sense) of this story or narrative. Thus while narrative therapy does, like the presently proposed intervention, involve the telling of stories, the underlying assumption in NT is that it is *the telling of one's own story* (or one's own version of that story) rather than *the story crafting process* which is regarded as the therapeutic tool.

It is possible that despite the apparent focus upon "telling one's own story" in NT, in some instances, albeit inadvertently, the same processes of barrier reduction and image sharing (interpreted from a Bormann perspective) may occur. And conversely, although personal disclosure is by no means necessary for the presently-described intervention to yield results, it is possible that students involved in the story telling session may choose to tell their own stories and indeed to gain benefit and make sense of their personal story, as in the narrative model. A thoughtful consideration of NT demonstrates the breadth of vectors understood to co-exist within the NT process, and therefore one can comfortably accept the capacity of the NT model to run parallel to the present intervention:

The narrative paradigm is really a confluence of theories from a variety of perspectives emphasizing both the primacy of language and the primacy of social context in creating and organizing experience and meaning. In addition to hermeneutics and phenomenology, theories of social constructionism and of postmodernism have emphasized that who one is and what one does is strongly influenced by exposure to one's culture. These theory bases argue that beliefs, emotions, and attitudes are culturally assimilated and transmitted through language. The language used to describe experience and the meaning made of experience is powerfully shaped by the culture, just as interpretations of mental illness are profoundly influenced by the "common-sense beliefs" or "folk psychology" of our culture. The family therapy field has developed a number of concrete therapeutic strategies that embody the assumptions inherent in social constructionism and postmodernism, and which promote the use of narrative in therapy. Specific strategies derive from the therapist's effort to facilitate "multiple realities," that is, to expand the client's repertoire of possible interpretations, and to add to and/or diffuse culturally dominant belief systems. (Focht & Beardslee, 1996, p.409)

In summary, while accepting the possibility of inadvertent overlap, in principle and in intent the present intervention is quite distinct in its aims and its intended methods compared to NT. The key difference is that with the present model, no self-disclosure is required, and this makes it all the more appropriate for general classroom work.

Conclusions.

In the present pilot study of an intended measure of AE and a class-based intervention aimed at improving the level of understanding of other people's emotions, a pilot group of seven students showed a significant positive movement in group AE. The students were senior primary school students with no "welfare referred" nor "learning related" problems. The measured change in AE was not due to a process of teaching about other people's feelings, but by the covert method of trying to make story vignettes "more interesting" by including hints about how the story characters might feel. The primary aim of the exercise was to demonstrate that the suggested intervention can indeed form a curriculum-like component which is "teachable", secondly that it appears acceptable to students and to the school in terms of content and style **and** ethical constraints.

From the present positive outcome (increased AE scores for the group members) future work should include:

1. evaluating the validity of the AE test by comparison with established measures of faulty social behaviour (for example, the Child Behaviour checklist);
2. trying the intervention program with a group which contained at least one target student, that is one who has been identified as having some social inadequacy;
3. determining that the AE scores of needy students do in fact change in the expected direction following the program;
4. matching the putative changes in AE with changed ratings on the CBC Teacher Report form, as the “standard” measure of Attachment Disorder-related social and behavioural problems.

The key question which would be the focus of future study is the durability of any changes, either in the general school population, or more importantly the durability of changes in students identified as having deficient understanding of other people’s emotions, and concomitant social problems.

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