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Editorial - December 2014

Michael Durrant
michael@briefsolutions.com.au

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Editorial

Michael Durrant

Welcome to the second issue of the *Journal of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy*.

This issue has fewer papers than the first issue; however, most of the papers are longer.

We are privileged to have the paper from the “microanalysis team” of Janet Beavin Bavelas, Peter De Jong, Sara Smock Jordan and Harry Korman. In this era of much discussion about “does therapy work?” and “*how* does therapy work?”, there is much conjecture about the different factors that might, or might not, contribute to the success of therapy (and different ideas about “common factors” vs. the benefits of particular models). However, little of this research (and conjecture) looks at what *actually happens* in therapy sessions. Janet Beavin Bavelas was co-author of *Pragmatics of human communication*, back in 1967 (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, 1967), a book that came out of the research being conducted at the MRI (Mental Research Institute) in Palo Alto, California. The MRI was, in many ways, the birthplace of brief therapy.

In his introduction to a special publication on communication, John Weakland (1967) suggested that the field of “communications” often had little to do with communication — it was concerned with communications engineering, telecommunications, information theory, analysis on the properties of particular messages, and so on. That is, “communications theory” appeared more concerned with theory than with communication.

Weakland proposed that the field of communication should look at “actual communication as it really exists in naturally occurring human systems ... Such a focus might seem simple and obvious, but it has until quite recently been denied, ignored or bypassed to an amazing extent. The study of communication involved almost everything except observing, recording, examining and describing real communication and interaction in detail” (1967, p. 1).

Bavelas, De Jong, Smock Jordan and Korman have embraced the study of “actual communication” in the therapy process ... by examining what thera-

pists and clients actually *say* to each other and how those sequences seem to show patterns. The paper in this issue is primarily a theoretical paper — although, I believe it still warrants careful study from those of us who are primarily clinicians. People often come to my training and say something like, “I’m hoping to get more tools for my toolbox”. Given that the *ONLY* tool we have is language, a paper about how language works to construct reality is probably useful!

The authors of this paper are working on a follow-up paper that will directly address the clinical implications of these research findings.

Dr Gale Miller was an “interested outsider” at the Brief Family Therapy Centre in Milwaukee for a number of years. Not a therapist, he brings a sociologists’ eye to Solution-Focused practice. Consistent with the previous paper, Gale’s understanding of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy was gained solely from what he actually saw and heard, sitting behind the one-way mirror in Milwaukee, rather than from any theoretical explanation. One of the criticisms of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (particularly compared to Narrative Therapy) was its neglect of issues of culture and politics. In this important paper, Gale proposes a way of thinking about culture within Solution-Focused Brief Therapy.

Nick Drury offers a follow-up paper to his paper in the first issue on what we can learn from Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language. Again, it is a paper that demands careful study but offers fascinating insights into how we think about what we do in therapy. James Beauchemin and Mo Yee Lee extend our thinking about Solution-Focused Brief Therapy into thinking about “coaching” and about wellness.

Many people in the Solution-Focused world know Dr Frank Thomas. Possibly the leading thinker and writer about Solution-Focused supervision, Frank is also the official “archivist” for the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Association. My “chat” with Frank was fascinating and kinda grew as we kept talking. I hope you find it as interesting as I did. Finally ... a longer than usual *Reviews* section.

Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J. & Jackson, D.D. (1976). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes*. New York: Norton.

Weakland, J. H. (1967). Communication and behavior — an introduction. in J. Weakland (Guest Editor), Special issue, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 10(8), 1–4.