DECOLONISATION AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTED GROUP WORK:
An Empowerment Narrative Leadership Programme for a Disadvantaged Community

M.J. Ubbink -marie.ubbink@nwu.ac.za

Recognition to A. Roux and H. Strydom

for the research of the Narrative Leadership Programme

Subject group Social Work, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

What did you see first?

I asked different people what they saw:

- The dentist said he saw the teeth and the skull first
- The social worker said she saw the figure of the girl

Do you think that this tells us something about how their realities are social constructed?

Social constructivist approach in decolonisation

The **research** on the Empowerment Narrative Leadership Programme provides social workers with a deeper insight into the process of empowering people from disadvantaged communities with leadership abilities by applying a narrative approach in group work and to develop members' individual potential with their social construction of leaders.

The structure of presentation:

- Social construction

- Decolonization

- The construction of social work in the new SA – a possible step to decolonization

- Group work in the post 1994 SA

- Research: An Empowerment Narrative Leadership group work programme

- Research Method

- Research Results:
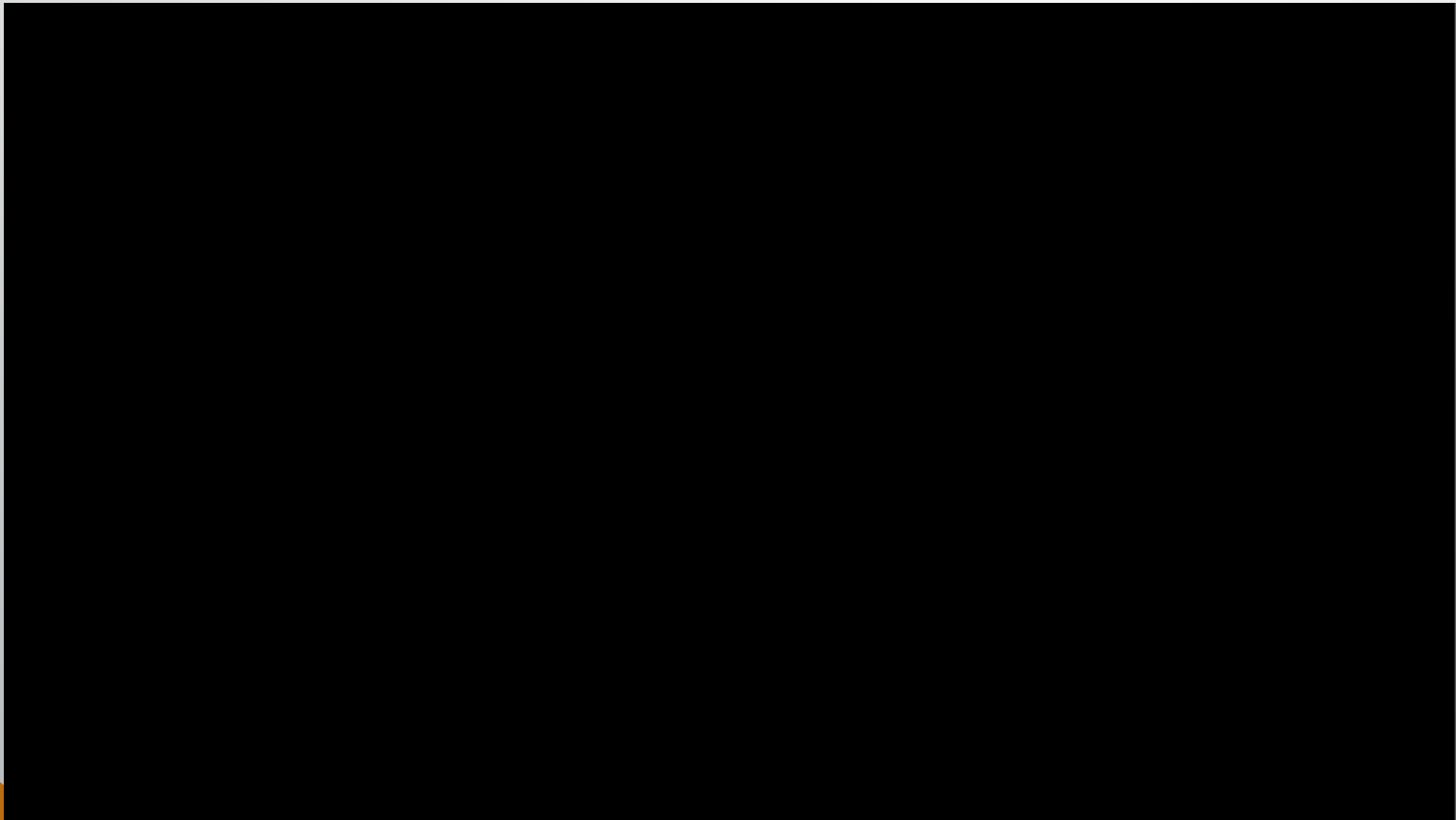
- Conclusions

- Summary

Discussion :
Social Constructionism

- Social construct (noun)

  "A social mechanism, phenomenon, or category created and developed by society; a perception of an individual, group, or idea that is 'constructed' through cultural or social practice"

- **Social constructionism** or the **social construction of reality** (also a **social concept**) is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. The theory centres on the notions that human beings rationalise their experience by creating models of the social world and share and reify these models through language.

Social construction (Video)

Discussion :
Social Constructionism

Constructivist and narrative theories focus on how individuals (group members) create and maintain their realities through life stories and subjective experiences. These theories are based on the premise that humans attach unique meaning to life experiences based on their social experiences and dialogue with the world around them

Thus each individual, group, community and country will have their own social constructions.

In SA we are busy with the social construction of decolonisation on different levels.

How is decolonization described (social constructed) ?

Decol0nization construct is constructed by people through the years in different countries that were colonised through the world.

- Decolonization is defined as the act of getting rid of colonization, or freeing a country from being dependent on an another country. An example- India gaining independent from England after World War II.

- Decolonization is the act or process of undoing of colonialism: where a nation establishes and maintains its domination over dependent territories.

- The Oxford English Dictionary defines decolonization as "*the withdrawal from its colonies of a colonial power; the acquisition of political or economic independence by such colonies*".

How did SA decolonization social construct developed and became relevant?

- The history of SA narrative has the traces of SA from prehistory through the European invasions, the settlement by the Dutch, the imposition of British rule, the many wars for control of the nation, the institution of apartheid, and, finally, freedom for all South Africans in 1994.

- Decolonization has gained particular prominence and renewed energy along with the 2015 # RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements.

- SA is poised at a critical moment in its decolonizing efforts. Anti-apartheid policies and legislation, SA has created a strong base (framework) for addressing colonial and apartheid legacies.

   (S Subreenduth, 2006)

Decolonization construct relevance now ?

- Recent actions and discussions in SA challenges managerial assumptions about decolonization, and traces the effects of a world economy of knowledge structured by the history of colonialism and current north-south global inequalities.

- Different knowledge information has been constructed in global space, which feedback on our understanding of the construct of knowledge itself.

- Decolonization in SA is not a fixed set of propositions but rather a challenge to develop new knowledge, skills and and new ways of learning with indigenous knowledge and globally expanded resources.*(Raewyn Connell, 2013)*

Discussion
Decolonization

Reconstructing and rethinking in more than two decades after apartheid has ended must be done because South Africans still sometimes tend to offer a view of the country that it is rooted in colonial thinking.

Currently the presenter's social construction of decolonisation in SA and with the limited knowledge of the construct is of opinion that in the post 1994 SA had formed a bases and some guidelines to build on and to develop further decolonization. To highlight decolonization will be in the best interest of SA.

Nevertheless, from literature it appears as though the social work profession is shifting into the practice as a profession that is taking steps towards decolonisation.

The construction of social work in the new SA – a possible step to decolonization

- After 4 centuries of colonial rule and apartheid, SA gained its independence and a democratic society was created through a process of constitutional negotiations and the final constitution, in the form of the Constitution of the Republic of SA Act No. 108 of 1996 was adopted.

- The historical developments of the country and social work as well as social welfare are closely linked. Social welfare before 1994 is constructed in the post apartheid era with the character of inequality.

- This new era marked transformation and reconstruction in SA social welfare system as a process of planned social change designed to promote the wellbeing of the population as a whole in conjunction with dynamic process of economic development

- Further Becker (2010) states that group work can play an important role in the developmental approach to facilitate the establishment of democratic societal structures, with goals of empowerment and advocacy, building capacity, and have components of democratization and participation transformation especially it find a connection with the traditional African heritage of ubuntu.

Group work in the new SA
a possible step to decolonization

Social Groupwork

- Narrative and social construct theories focus on how group members create and maintain their realities through life stories and subjective experiences and the dialogue with the world around them.

Research:
An Empowerment Narrative Leadership Group work project

- An Empowerment Narrative Leadership Program for a Disadvantaged Community

- Marie, J. Ubbink Adrie Roux & Herman Strydom

- This research is providing social workers with a deeper insight into the process of empowering people from disadvantaged communities with leadership abilities by applying a narrative approach in group work and to develop members' individual potential within their **social construction** of leaders and leadership.

Research: Group work project
Background:

- Post 1994 SA, disadvantaged communities are longing for transformation as individuals or groups of people (communities) faced special problems such as lack of money or financial support, and poverty, and are deemed to be without sufficient power or other means of influence.. In 2011, STATS SA (2014) reported that 32.9% of all households in SA were living below the Upper-Bound Poverty Line of R620 per month.

- Since 1994, social development and the empowerment of individuals and communities have become a priority in SA.

- Therefore the aim of this study was to empower disadvantaged individuals to discover their potential as leaders and to apply it in their own lives through the use of the narrative leadership programme.

Research: Group work project
Narrative Approach:

- When this research was conducted, very little focus existed between narrative therapy and social group work in the SA context. The "bottom-up" empowerment approach was followed .

- Research adopts the postmodern, narrative, social constructivist worldview that emphasizes that realities are socially constructed, and that peoples' constructs differs from one person to another. There is no objective truth in the social constructive world view.

- It is evident that a need exists in SA for the effective empowerment of persons as leaders. The narrative approach that goes hand-in-hand with social construction is culture-friendly. It is accepted that group member/s will have their own construct of leaders and leadership in their community and in their culture.

Research: Group work project
Programme

- With the development of the group work programme the group members were included in the development process. The programme consisted of eight weekly sessions

Research: Group work project:
Research Method

- The research was undertaken within the developmental research and utilisation model (DR & U model) (Grinnell 1981) with a combined qualitative and quantitative research approach in the social constructivist paradigm

- Two external evaluators and the group members themselves were also used to do the evaluation.

- The group work leadership development program was also evaluated by group members by means of the researcher's self-compiled questionnaire.

Research Method

Participants Six individuals of the community. The ages of participants varied from 22 to 45 years.

Data Collection through group interviews that were done with participants. Besides information from normal group discussion, video recordings were made of the group sessions, as well as verbatim transcriptions of the videos.

(The **need** for leadership came up in a community meeting that was held in Greenspark, a predominantly mixed race (coloured) neighbourhood in the North West. The subject 'leadership' was introduced and the conclusion of the meeting was that leadership in their community was inadequate and needed to be addressed. While founding a community forum in the area, it became evident that the problems the community faces were definitely related to leadership).

Research Results

Two external consultants evaluation of the group's experiences were:

- Group members decided to join the group to improve their leadership characteristics.

- They found the group to be an excellent medium through which they could get to **know and discover themselves**.

- The film "Lion King" was an excellent aid that evoked emotions amongst the group members and the protected atmosphere in the group **contributed to people moving out from behind the masks of their past**. During the evaluation, members emphasized the fact that they were given the opportunity to get to know themselves; **could voice their feelings and opinions**; could tell their story and experience the support and protection of the group.

- **Alternative ideas had been put on the table** as a result of reflection and can lead to stories being socially constructed.

- **An improved self-image, self-confidence and understanding of other's problems.**

Research Results

- Empowered the members to **act with self-confidence, to stand for something and to assert themselves in various situations**. Feedback from the group members were: "**Yes, I can now perform as a leader**" ; "**I now believe in myself** "; "**I can now take a stand**".

- Remarks on the success of "Yes, I can now perform as a leader" indicates **their willingness to empower others**. In doing that, they can help **build a well-functioning community**.

- The group **members were able to reconstruct their "story"** of choice rather than the problem-drenched story remaining the dominant one in the individuals' lives.

- The external consultants agreed that the group sessions had equipped and empowered the **members to act as leaders** with their self-confidence and leadership characteristics that were developed in the broader community.

Research **Results**

Closed questions were used in the provided questionnaire

- *In reply to the **question** concerning the degree to which the program contributed to expanding the knowledge of the group members about themselves and leadership*, 89% of members felt that they were leaders with a "voice". Some of them were unaware of the potential that had been evoked inside them.

- *A question regarding the degree to which the group sessions had helped group members in identifying their leadership characteristics*, 89% of the group members indicated that they realized that they first needed to investigate their "inner self" before they could take lead. Characteristics that were identified were, inter alia, self-honesty, perseverance, self-confidence, responsibility, and good listening skills.

Research **Results**

Closed questions were used in the provided questionnaire

- *A question was as to whether they became aware of any characteristics during the group sessions which they previously were not aware of and whether they could consider it as an alternative in their leadership role.* 94% of the group members indicated the following characteristics: "I could stick to my point of view"; "I can listen to people's problems and help them"; "Accept that I can educate and manage my child"; "can now live my leadership spontaneously to the full, as well as the changes that accompany it".

Research Results

- *A question concerning the degree to which the group members now have the confidence to take the initiative in a training programme for leaders,* 89% indicated that they felt equipped as a result of the programme and felt competent to manage a group. Their fears were dispelled and they did not feel self-conscious about what others thought of them.

- *A further question to the group was whether they felt in any way empowered as leaders through attending the group sessions.* 100% of the group members indicated that they had taken control over themselves and their leadership. Some of them expressed the view that they could motivate and support others and make decisions on their own.

Research conclusions

- From a social constructivist point of view, themes and experiences that come to the fore during the group dialogues will be given priority to be discussed in group context. Doing it this way, the group members must be made aware that they are the experts in the process which emphasises the idea of 'starting where the client is' (Toseland & Rivas, 2014).

- **Externalization** is exceptional of the narrative approach and forms an integral part of the narrative process in group work. Externalizing practices are alternatives to internalizing practices. Externalizing locates problems not within individuals, but as products of culture and history (Akinyela, 2014; Ricks et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2015). To understand the narrative approach and programme the structure of the group and management of the group processes are dealt with during the first group session as will be done with other treatment groups

Research conclusions

- In the narrative approach deconstruction and reconstruction are a continuous process in the group dialogue and the group process as a whole. Narrative therapy is concerned with discovering, acknowledging and "taking apart" (deconstructing) the beliefs, ideas and practices of the broader culture in which the group lives, therefore externalizing and exposing the problem and the problem story (Morgan, 2000). The experience of one of the members was that her insecurities changed to self-confidence which was noticed by her employer and other community members who acknowledged and gave her positive feed-back.

- The members acknowledged that they now with their new constructs of leadership they understood the following alternative leadership characteristics: A leader must be 'responsible', have 'self-confidence', is 'disciplined', 'on time', is 'always prepared' and must be well-dressed.

Research conclusions

- Group work by means of the narrative approach in social work is recommended because it has become evident from this study that a rich description of the lives of people can be gained. One of the group members responded so well to the narrative approach that the change in her was noticed by her employer and she became headmistress of a nursery school.

- The process in the narrative approach of people's description of their life and experiences gives meaning to the lives of people and influences what they do and how they live. The deduction can be made that narrative therapy is "culture friendly" as the positive outcomes of this group work programme was high even though the social worker and group members were from different cultural backgrounds.

Summary

Decolonisation that is socially constructed in SA has already taken off in the post 1994. However, the knowledge and skills about constructs are limited and form a limited guideline as a result.

I want to use the following pictures as a metaphor to emphasise that the more we focus on it the better knowledge and understanding we will obtain that is in the best interest of the country.

If you look at these photos they look like a dog, rabbit and cat. But when you zoom on them individually you will see the beauty of photography ...

That is how life is, until you zoom on people's lives you wouldn't understand who they really are.

Summary

- The research with the social constructionist approach are culturally sensitive and can be apply in SA.

P.S.

- At the NWU in group work module the students prescribed book includes the social construction and narrative approached and student is motivated to apply it in practice