

BOOK REVIEWS

Opportunities in Solution-Focused Interviewing: Clients' Key Words and Therapists' Responses by Joel K Simon and Lance Taylor

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This new examination of the insights microanalysis offers into the co-construction of conversations between therapist and client takes a fresh look at how practitioners select from among client's responses, and what opportunities each choice offers. With practical charts providing clear ways to 'defragment' clients' utterances, the book also helps practitioners better analyse their own practices.

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Routledge, 2023, 222 pages, ISBN 9781032500539, £29.99 paperback (Kindle edition available).

This interesting and inspiring book offers a historical sketch of the Solution Focused approach, and chiefly focusses on how we as practitioners can qualify our conversations by looking for opportunities based on micro-analysis.

I deliberately cite "practice" and "conversation" as this book's contents can be applied in a variety of contexts, not only supervision, training and coaching, but all areas where professionals want to learn more about their own practice and clarify: *Do I really do what I think or say I do?*

As in any other seriously solution-focused book, Joel K Simon and Lance Taylor offer, in addition to a historical outline, a list of basic assumptions for solution-focused work. These assumptions are usefully laid out in dialogue sequences and with clear references, giving a clear overview of how assumptions show up in actions. As the authors suggest, more experienced solution-focused practitioners can skip this section of the book.

But if you are new to solution focus, you may benefit from this trip down memory lane, where you will read about the influence of Milton Erickson, the Mental Research Institute and Ludwig Wittgenstein on the development of this approach, not to mention the subsequent evolution of the approach

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itself. Though I consider myself reasonably experienced, I gained new insights into, for example, the Pattern Disruption Technique from Milton Erickson - you never know where the gold nuggets will be...

By reading the entire book, you are slowly and thoroughly guided through the genesis of the solution-focused approach, with its historical roots in family therapy covered, and concrete tools and maps provided for use in the conversation. I found the review of the 'Common Client Language' and 'Useful Therapist Responses' particularly useful. Small distinctions such as 'hear stop, think start' or 'hear internal, think about interactional' (p 58) are especially easy to adapt into practice.

I appreciate the book's transparency in recognising different ways of practicing solution-focused conversations; not only are there variations in different ways of responding to the client, but the authors recognise the different ways of (for example) using compliments (p 72) or that some might start the scale work at 0 and others at 1, and both can be argued for (p 73). You might call it "writing solution-focused" – as it makes the reader competent: whatever way you work, it's fine, *you know best*.

While others have written about how we can use microanalysis to gain insights into how conversations are co-constructed between therapist and client, the main body of this book claims to look at the numerous possibilities that dialogues provide, how we select from the client's responses, and what opportunities each choice offers.

As solution-focused therapists or coaches, we listen to the client's answers, select what to build our next question on, and construct questions. The 'Listen-Select-Build' process (p 63) is well known. However, by reading this book, you get the opportunity to reflect on the variety of options available. In what different ways can a question be formulated from a single utterance? And how do you choose which question to ask? It's both fascinating and instructive; fascinating when you discover how many ways you can respond, and instructive when you discover that with so many ways to respond, there are ways of choosing which way to go!

By analysing small sentences from a therapeutic session, the authors clearly demonstrate the possibilities that arise when we 'defragment' a client's utterance and spotlight the different options. It's presented clearly and usefully through a chart which the reader is invited to try out in their own practice (pp 197-198).

Anyone who is curious about the construction of dialogues and the numerous possibilities the language offers will benefit from this book. If you can also take a critical, investigative and learning approach to your own practice, the book can be used as a starting point for development, as it conveys concrete tools to reflect upon - and thus qualify practice.

Opportunities in Solution-Focused Interviewing: Clients' Key Words and Therapists' Responses not only presents the possibilities the authors see, but also provides the opportunity for you to analyse your practice and gain new insight into your possibilities.

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