

Dear colleagues, dear friends from the NFTOs,

We are happy to inform you about recent events and further developments in the Chamber of NFTOs!

1. Oslo June 2012 European Family Therapy Association/National Family Therapy Organisations Chamber Meeting. Our Norwegian NFTO experience started with a stimulating research seminar held at the University Hospital by our marvelous hosts and led by NFTO Chamber Board member, Hans-Christian Michaelsen, and Marianne Bie, Chair of the Norwegian Family Therapy Association.

The Research Event in Oslo, June 2012

The presenters were clinical psychologists, clinical social workers and professors of leading Institutions in family therapy, training and research.

The historical development of family therapy in Norway was traced, especially for the public sector. From this overview the prominence of marital counseling services and child protection services became evident. Leaders in the field, such as Andersen, contributed to the pronounced tendency towards more collaborative, egalitarian, transparent and service involved practices which stress the importance of working with people in their context rather than just in the office, and of involving evaluation in an integrated manner along with treatment.

Dr. Rolf Sundet, clinical psychologist, Sykehuset Buskerud, Vestreviken HF, Buskerud University College and Psychological Institute, presented his experience of the use of feedback in a local family service, which apart from contributing directly to the therapeutic process, helps build practice-based-evidence for future use.

As he pointed out, the message to the parent who comes into the family service is not so much to be the recipient of the service provided by the therapist, but for the therapist and the client to form a collaborative relationship that will lead to the desired effect.

The questionnaires provided are used as “conversational tools”. Through this conversation process, areas of life become identified and the client chooses to focus on what he/she needs to work on most: in the words of parents, “The scales helped us express and become more specific as to what we want to change”. They also provide new ways of connecting with kids or of exploring with adults alternative solutions to finding jobs. They give family members the feeling that they are listened to.

Dr. Terje Tilden, a clinical social worker, associate director of the Modum Bad Research Institute presented the Systemic Therapy Inventory of Change – STIC feedback system (Pinsof, Zinbarg, Lebow, Knobloch-Fedders et al., 2009) as a new promising feedback instrument. It has been implemented in a pilot project within five Norwegian psychotherapy sites. The presenter shared with us his experience from this project, stating also that the feedback information constitutes also research data.

“This comprehensive feedback system is primarily tailored for couple and family therapy, but is also applicable in individual and group therapies. Clients complete their questionnaires via internet before and during therapy, and electronic reports are immediately available to the therapists. Sharing this progress and process information with the client in the following session can therefore contribute to enhancing client codetermination on intervention decisions, thus facilitating better processes and outcomes during the course of therapy”.

Some of us in the audience who work with different groups of population and conditions in the various countries, received with a lot of skepticism images of therapist and client looking together, on an iPod screen, at the graph computed by the client’s answers on STIC before the session, which appeared electronically on-line through “save log in procedures on Microsoft platform” ... This image along with the techno-language may have sounded foreign to some of the audience’s ears.

The presenters on evidence- and feedback-based treatment reminded us of research that has repeatedly found that feedback to the therapist increases the incidence of recovery and decreases the incidence of deterioration.

There is a multi-dimensional perspective in the feedback based therapy:

- a) it collects feedback here and now for therapy,
- b) it collects data for the particular population the client belongs to
- c) it gives an opportunity to compare the specific case with the whole population, normative sample or nearest neighbor. This forms a good basis for prognosis and treatment.

The reflecting audience brought up several issues that enriched the discussion: to what extent a researcher’s view point interferes with the clinical role of the therapist. They wondered whether we have a good grasp as to how this fusion functions. Culture was another issue. To what extent Norwegian culture facilitates such an approach, whereas other cultures might not be open to this. Therapists may be hesitant because they may feel monitored by their boss and may see themselves as losing autonomy. Reservation was also expressed as to how to account for those clients who refuse to give feedback. The need for follow-up was mentioned.

The research presentations as a whole proposed a specific coherent point: feedback in therapy bridges research with clinical practice and encourages the collaboration between therapist and client, placing the client in a more responsible position in a process of therapy, which is systematically “empirically informed”. The responsibility of clients is increased through:

- a) their answering to specific tools and questions regarding the issues that they think are important or those they see progress in
- b) utilizing their answers as a stimulus for discussion between therapist and client, during which the client’s understanding of his/her own data becomes an important source of guidance to the therapeutic process.

c) moreover in the case of couple therapy the two partners have the opportunity to compare their answers, commonalities and differences, and thus dialogue between them is encouraged.

As it was pointed out two important predictors of positive change are encouraged: an early understanding of desired change and an early establishing of therapeutic alliance.

Dr. Ottar Ness, associate professor and researcher at Buskerud University College and its Research Institute for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, a family therapist at Trondheim Family Therapy Centre, and a teacher at the Institute of Social Work and Family Therapy at Diakonhjemmet University College, drew our attention to another important factor in therapy: the team of colleagues in a workplace and relational language.

He presented a collaborative research project on the process and experience in learning Johnella Bird's relational language-making practices. He described how, adapting John Heron's Cooperative Inquiry, a team of colleagues in the workplace, engaged in a challenging collaborative learning process, focus at the same time on making sense of the learning that was taking place. He explained that learning relational language aims at "becoming more mindful of the use of language with couples and of raising awareness in couples of how they use language with each other". The point is to shift from language with individual meaning to relational meaning by considering the "negotiation of meaning an all-time process in therapy". He described the procedure of listening to recordings and videotapes and reading journals of 5 couples who were seen together in group supervision. The collaborating team of colleagues shared their taped discussions of this material with the couples themselves, who were given the opportunity to comment on them. Strengths and weaknesses of this procedure were pointed out. Client feedback was reported as *helpful to therapists and to their professional development, as was learning together as colleagues, through the use of videos for self-supervision.*

Dr. Per Jensen, Professor at the Institute of Social Work and Family Therapy, of the Diakonhjemmet University College, took us at another level - that of our direct personal involvement as therapists in the therapeutic process. His presentation was titled: "PERSONAL LIFE AND THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE. AN INVESTIGATION OF MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE THERAPISTS' PERSONAL AND PRIVATE LIFE AND HER OR HIS THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE".

He pointed at the importance of looking into the patterns that connect narratives from therapist's own personal and private life with narratives from systemic family therapy. He criticized evidence-based research and evidence based practice as seemingly leaving out therapist's reality (his/her own personal and cultural background and current life) of the understanding of psychotherapy and of the clinical competence of the therapist. Using examples, he demonstrated how clinical practice is connected and influenced by the personal self of the therapist with all his/her private experience at least as much as by the professional

self and theoretical approach. He, as well as the audience, pointed at the need for more research on that issue.

While we were in Oslo the trial of mass murderer Anders Behring was nearing its climax at the court room close to our hotel. Behring had admitted the slaughter of 53 people mostly youth of a left leaning political party. The young people we chatted to on a disconcertingly bright summer evening at 11.30 p.m. spoke about their hopes and fears for Norway and Europe, how the trial had suddenly brought home to them that public safety is something even Norwegians can no longer take for granted. We were taken for a stroll in the famous Vigeland sculpture park where the strong ideal archetypes of male naked figures and a family of children held in a circle by their father could be contrasted with the figure of a little boy on a bridge, screaming with fury (pictures to be attached include one of all the Board and chamber members).

Our Greek colleagues had decided to cut short their stay to be home in time to vote in the General election called to try to bring order to the economic and social confusion in their debt-ridden country. As well as Greece and UK there were representatives from Norway, Germany, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria and Italy. Northern and Southern European countries had an opportunity to debate the vexed issue of community solidarity in the face of a crisis affecting us all whichever side of the money supply divide we happen to be sitting on. Naturally we were asking ourselves: What can family therapy and systemic thinking usefully contribute to the crisis facing Europe? Specifically we were asking ourselves how NFTOs might engage in the wider political discourse on behalf of client families suffering at this time from the economic malaise.

Before the meeting we had asked Chamber members what they wanted from EFTA. We asked them to rank their top concerns and these ranged from Research and Evidence Based Practice, Accreditation of Systemic Family & Psychotherapists, Training and Education standards, Financial concerns as a reflection of the economic crisis and apathy among members. Many NFTO representatives have expressed concern that the current website is not user friendly and required updating urgently. They want to see the development of a user-friendly platform to exchange news and views about the work of the three chambers in relation to clinical practice, training and successful initiatives with easy links to relevant information in order to promote family therapy and systemic thinking in our respective countries. Thanks to the hard work of the Website working Group we made significant progress with regard to agreeing a way forward by unanimously agreeing to pursue the bid of a particular website design company whose designs looked attractive and whose interfaces look up-to-date and user-friendly.

Among other events put on for our benefit was a breezy boat trip through the Oslo fjords, a perfect setting for the international exchange of ideas ranging from fish recipes, NFTO finances and the state of the world!

Next year's meeting will be over the weekend of 8-10th March 2013 in Prato, Italy. The idea of holding the NFTO Chamber meeting at the same time as a national conference is an experiment to see whether or not such a joint event is mutually beneficial to the two associations. If it works well the experiment will be repeated in future years. We are all looking forward to Italy. Arrivederci (see below)!

II. EFTA-TIC-Meeting for Trainers. From the NFTO-Board Maria Borcsa, Hans-Christian Michaelsen and Monica Whyte participated at the EFTA-TIC-Meeting for Trainers which took place in Ohrid, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, from Friday, September 21st to Sunday, September 23rd, 2012. The meeting was organized by Slavica Gkaitatzis and her INSTITUTE FOR MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND SYSTEMIC PRACTICE – ALTERNATIVA, SCHOOL FOR FAMILY AND SYSTEMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY in Skopje. We wish to express our gratitude not only for learning from international colleagues in workshops and during conversations but also for having the possibility to visit this enchanting city near one of the oldest lakes in the world! Promoting the idea of enhancing knowledge throughout the chambers and in the systemic community in general we want to invite trainers from the NFTOs to join the next EFTA-TIC-Trainers' Meeting, which will be held in 2014 – further information will follow!

III. The next NFTO-Chamber Meeting will be held from **March 8th to 10th, 2013 in Prato** (near Florence), **Italy**. We are hosted by the Italian NFTO named SIPPR (Società Italiana di Psicologia e Psicoterapia Relazionale) having their annual conference during this weekend. This gives us the opportunity not only to get to know better one European NFTO and to attend a Plenary Session with European colleagues (in English) but also to contribute as EFTA-NFTO Chamber to the conference and exchange with Italian colleagues and their concerns in greater depth. Planning a special format (Open Conversation with a Reflecting Team) we want to share reflections on questions like the following:

“If you are observing the processes in your country, what kinds of trends in systems (for example within families, schools, universities) strike you most - socially and politically? “

“How are systemic work and approaches reacting to social challenges? What are the strengths and deficits of the systemic approaches in reacting to the social/political changes that we and those who we work and live with are experiencing?”

“What is most needed for systemic approaches to advance? What would make a difference?”

Of course, we will also continue our work e.g. on research and other subjects you are willing to elaborate in further detail. David Amias, the secretary of the EFTA-NFTO will send the NFTO representatives the invitations to that meeting, so please write to him if there are any personal changes in your NFTO and **save the date!**

Looking forward to meeting you all in Prato,

On behalf of the NFTO -Board
Maria Borcsa, Mina Polemi-Todoulou & David Amias