

## Postgraduate Certificate in Systemic Practice – Year 2 Intermediate (Child Focused)

### Institute of Family Therapy

I vividly remember travelling on the tube to the first teaching day back in October 2016, desperately trying to finish the session reading and noticing a female in her thirties tentatively stepping on the train and sitting next to me. I somehow sensed, in the interpersonal space between us that this person was troubled. This year has enhanced my attunement to vulnerability which helps me empathise and connect with young people and informs the decisions I make in nurturing therapeutic relationships. Some time passed and a polite voice said 'excuse me sir, are you a family therapist?' I explained why I was reading the paper, *The Origins of Family Therapy* (Carr, 2000). She then went on to describe a personal experience of relational trauma, drug and alcohol use and family relationship breakdown. She finished with the question 'do you feel family therapy would be helpful for my family?' On reflection, this was an extraordinary encounter. What was it that enabled this person to open herself in this way to a complete stranger? My hypothesis was that she saw the words 'family therapy' at the top of the page and that was enough for her. I realised then, that what I was about to undertake held enormous power, enormous opportunity and was an enormous privilege. This is a narrative that I have integrated into my learning and practice from day one of the course. I am extremely grateful to The Foundation for Professionals in Service to Adolescents for their financial support, enabling me to undertake this training.

Reflecting on what I have connected with most on this course, themes of playfulness and use of humour appear again and again. I have been inspired by Barry Mason and Jim Wilson and I feel they have given permission to connect to my own personal characteristics of playfulness humour and performance bringing them into my practice more intentionally as a therapeutic technique. I am always mindful of what Minuchin suggested with regard to engaging families: 'In order to join the family, he emphasizes the aspects of his personality and experience that are syntonic with the families' (1974, p. 91).

I have been encouraged to embrace my creativity this year and noticed the transformative impact this way of working can have when engaging adolescents. The tree of life (Ncazelo Ncube, 2006) is something I have been experimenting with and admire the way it skilfully introduces new, more positive narratives into problem saturated scripts.

I have been pleased with my development in the area of case colure and meaningful endings through the use of therapeutic letters. I loved the social constructionist focus of the programme and that as professionals working with adolescents we have 'powerful influences of specific voices and stories that can affect a person's self-stories' (Hedges, 2005 p. 55).

I have deepened my understanding into the social GRACES and systemic ideas around race and racism really resonated. The concept of white male privilege and its implications for me as a white male practitioner is something I reflected on deeply and as a result, I feel more confident in communicating across and naming difference. Vecchio states that 'the world is only too ready to reappoint those who are white and male to the position of unquestioned experts and we, unfortunately, are too ready to accept these appointments' (2008, p. 259). I will take from this year that I should be a questioning novice in this matter.