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**Supplementary** **material to accompany video 2:**

**‘the conceptual axis of clinical papers’**

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This is the supplementary material that accompanies my second *JAP* video ‘The conceptual axis of clinical papers’. All material quoted below is used with the kind permission of each author. I am grateful to them for agreeing to share their work and also to John Wiley & Sons Ltd, publisher of the *Journal of Analytical Psychology,* for permission to quote from the journal.

**The narrative and conceptual axes of clinical papers**

As I mentioned in my first *JAP* video, most of the clinical papers we write combine a clinical story and teaching points that are drawn out of that story to comment on its meaning and significance. Since narratives run through time, I think of a paper’s **narrative axis** as the storyline and represent it schematically with a horizontal line. The **conceptual axis** is composed of linked ideas or teaching points that are abstracted from the clinical story to build interpretations, concepts, and theory. I represent the conceptual axis with a vertical line along which ideas at different **levels of abstraction** or complexity are laid out (See Naiburg 2015, pp. 104-114, 181, 184,188-189, 234, 243-244).

To underscore the difference between the narrative axis and the conceptual axis, let’s think about Favero and Candellieri’s description of Jason, the nocturnal youth who prefers the comfort of virtual relations to all others, which I quoted in my first video. If I headlined their article ‘From social anxiety and school refusal to notoriety among virtual peers’, I would be framing their discussion of Jason as a narrative that traces change through time. That is one way of describing it. But Jason’s story is used to demonstrate the compensatory function of virtual relations for an avoidant adolescent filled with shame and to show the impact of technology on his life. In this way of characterizing Favero and Candellieri’s writing, I am highlighting the concepts they use Jason’s story to illustrate.

It’s easier for most clinical writers to tell a good story than it is to persuasively link narrative details to concepts and theory. To do that effectively, you have to build your ideas gradually or **stepwise** (Naiburg 2015, p. 85, pp. 108-112, 185-189, 216-217), either **bottom up** (p. 102, 119, 166, 176) from the narrative details to interpretations, concepts, and theory or **top down (**p. 102, 166, 176) from theory to concepts, interpretations, and narrative details, thus linking the ideas that are at different levels of abstraction.

**Analyzing Judith Pickering’s ‘Who’s afraid of the Wolfe couple: an interlocking traumatic scene’**

In my second *JAP* video, I used excerpts from Judith’s Pickering’s ‘Who’s afraid of the Wolfe couple: an interlocking traumatic scene’ to illustrate how to link ideas that constitute the paper’s conceptual axis. I started by quoting narrative details, because writing your clinical story is the easiest way for most writers to begin. In her paper, Pickering not only tells us about the first session with the Wolfe couple but also shows us how that scene unfolds as if it is happening before our eyes. She also gives us access to her internal experience. Here’s the first excerpt I quote in that video.

*Mimi rang me to make an appointment for couple psychotherapy explaining, ‘my partner Steven and I have been going out for nine months but seem to have reached a bit of a dead end. I need to know what Steven's intentions are, so I don't waste any more time flogging a dead horse’*

*Mimi, an elegantly dressed Chinese woman in her mid-thirties, dragged a rather reluctant suitor into the consulting room. Before we had time to settle in our seats, she announced, in a slightly imperious tone, that if Steven didn't propose by the end of the hour it would confirm her worst fears. This somewhat tall order for our first therapy session had me sit bolt upright on the edge of my seat, while Steven slumped down into his chair as if wishing the very fabric might swallow him.*

(Pickering 2006,p. 253).

Notice how Pickering helps us visual this scene with details of Mimi’s age, dress, and character and how she portrays Steven as ‘a reluctant suitor’, who slumps ‘down into his chair as if wishing the very fabric might swallow him’. It is as if Pickering has written a script for a play, complete with dialogue, character description, and implied stage directions. I can see what she sees. She also gives us access to her inner experience. She slips in interpretative details without slowing the story down. She does that when she describes Mimi’s tone as ‘slightly imperious’ and Steven as ‘a reluctant suitor’. Pickering’s opening narrative sequence has all the marks of an **immediate scene** (Stein 1995; Naiburg 2015, pp. 3-5, 15-19, 81-84), which I believe is the star of narrative writing and introduced in my first *JAP* video.

Pickering continues with her description of Mimi while also giving us access to her understanding of what’s going on:

*Rolling her eyes in response to Steven's downcast look, she responded, ‘Thought so! Just what I expected!’.*

*It was all too apparent that my ‘agency’ would be deemed utterly ineffectual if this proposal didn't get delivered according to her set romantic formula by the end of the hour.*

*Under the surveillance of her gaze of appraisal, and attempting to wriggle out from the projection of fairy godmother/matchmaker, I suggested perhaps we might give ourselves a bit of breathing space to ponder what might be going on behind the scenes (and it might take a little longer than one session!).*

(Pickering 2006, p. 253)

Pickering continues to play this scene out just as skillfully as she began it. When it comes to an end, she offers these interpretations that build the conceptual axis of her paper:

*Both Mimi and Steven were locked in an altercation which had all the hallmarks of a traumatic complex covering an all too-soft underbelly. Underneath Mimi's fantasy of being*

*adored as the princess-bride and Steven's fantasy of being a dashing athletic hero, both were more alike than met the eye. What manifested as vacillation on Steven's part and imperious-ness on Mimi's masked shameful feelings of inadequacy and fears of abandonment.*

(Pickering 2006, p. 254).

With the interpretation that the Wolfe couple is ‘locked in an altercation that has all the hallmarks of a traumatic complex’, Pickering offers an idea at a higher level of complexity than her observations of Mini’s and Stephen’s body language and character. Pickering also notes how Mimi’s and Stephen’s childhood shame is operating behind their relational posturing. Pickering introduces the idea of traumatic memory systems that get organized into scenes, one of which is being enacted by this couple in the first session with Pickering. Pickering names the scene ‘an **intra**locking traumatic scene’ because what’s being played out is related to each individual’s own intrapsychic object-relational world. She goes on to explain that when the two **intra**locking scenes belonging to each partner became activated in the intersubjective dynamics of their relationship, they give rise to an **inter**locking traumatic scene.

To illustrate the levels of abstraction Pickering employs, I’ve stacked her ideas below and suggest you read them from the level of narrative details at the bottom of the diagram, stepwise up to the top.

**Inter**locking Scene

**Intra**locking Traumatic Scene

Underlying Childhood Shame and Object Relations

Interpretations

of Mimi’s and Stephen’s body language, behaviour, character, fantasies

----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Narrative details of Mimi and Stephen’s first session

The ideas above the line that separates the narrative details from interpretations, concepts, and theory represent the core of Pickering’s conceptual axis.

In quoting her paper, I began with her clinical story, although she starts her paper with a much broader consideration: how coming into being is ‘a relational activity’. In her paper’s first paragraph, she tells us about the interlocking traumatic scene, the idea that tops her conceptual axis as I’ve schematized it above. Here are her paper’s opening paragraphs:

*Becoming who we are is a relational activity. We are continually created, destroyed and remade in the crucible of our relations. Yet human encounters are continuously obstructed by the ways we unwittingly conscript and are conscripted to play allotted roles in falsely stereotypic and repetitive unconscious psychological scenarios. These scenes create an entangled web of obscuration and distortion preventing true intimacy from flourishing. Such scenes involve an interpenetration of unconscious defensive traumatic material, the ‘malignant dowries’ that each person brings to the new relationship.*

*I have variously called such intersubjective dramas the ‘interlocking traumatic scene’, the ‘interlocking fantastic scene’ and the ‘interlocking model* *scene’. My terminological dilemma represents the problem of finding terms which sublimate dualistic divisions, reductive causal chains between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ reality, the role of ‘actual’ and ‘fantasized’ experience, the status of the ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ (M)other etc.*

(Pickering 2006, pp. 251-252)

**Another example of the conceptual axis**

In the second video, I quote a vignette that Joan and Neville Symington (1996) use to illustrate Bion’s concept of the container/contained. You’ll find a fuller discussion of it in my (2015) book (pp. 174-176). In this vignette, an analyst meets a 33-year-old, mentally handicapped man who may be capable of doing more than ‘menial tasks’ in the shelter workshop. The authors tell us that words ‘would sometimes dribble out from the corner’ of the patient’s mouth (p. 51). For example:

*I am 33 years old and is that nothing?*

*And a moment later:*

*Can’t you give me a picture of who I am?*

*The analyst said:*

*The fact that you feel they have been thirty-three years of emptiness, waste and nothingness is so painful that it is better to have people’s pictures of you than to face this ghastly nothingness.*

*He replied:*

*Well, if you won’t give me a picture what do I come here for?*

*The analyst stood up, placed himself alongside him and said:*

*It is like this. There in front of us is thirty-three years of waste, nothing and emptiness. It is like sitting in a train and opposite sits a man with a wounded and diseased face and it is so horrific that you have to hold pictures up in front of you because it is more than you can bear. But the reason you come to see me is that perhaps there is just a possibility that if you have me beside you then you can look at it.*

(Symington & Symington 1996, pp. 51-2)

***Writing exercise 1***

Using my schema depicting Pickering’s conceptual axis as a guide, create a schema for the Symingtons’ example above. Put the narrative details at the bottom of the page and put the overarching idea at the top. Then fill in the ideas between these two levels.

Once you’re finished, skip to the end of this supplementary material to see how I’ve done it. Your schema may not look exactly like mine, and that’s okay. What’s important is that you can stack the Symingtons’ ideas, starting with the narrative details and working up through different levels of abstraction to create a visual representation of the writers’ conceptual axis.

In my (2015) book you will find more examples of this visual way of schematizing linked ideas along the conceptual axis (pp. 105, 111-112, 185, 187).

***Writing exercise 2***

Take any immediate scene you’ve written or have read and notice how the author has interwoven interpretations or commentary into the narrative details. Underline those interpretative comments (like Mimi’s ‘slightly imperious tone’ or Stephen’s being ‘a reluctant suitor’).

Make a diagram like the ones above or the ones you found in my book. At the bottom put some of the narrative details. On top of those details list some interpretative comments that are either made (e.g., about patterns of behaviour, character structure, fantasies) or inferred. Above that, write any concepts named or implied by the writer, working your way up the levels of abstraction to the author’s overarching idea.

**In closing**

I close my second video with the following writing tips: When you start to tell a clinical story, you may not be sure what conceptual work you want it to do. That’s fine, because you can discover the concepts you need to understand your story as you write. Start with telling the clinical story. Practice writing narrative summaries, vignettes, and immediate scenes.

We need more papers that are rich, evocative, and experience-near narratives, especially ones that include an immediate scene and give readers access to the analyst’s experience. Write your story first. Then when you are ready, step back and see if you want to draw out some teaching points from that story. Maybe you will take one step in that direction, maybe more, and you can use Pickering’s example for guidance along with others, including those in my book.

I encourage you to think of writing as a process of discovering something about yourself, your patients, and your clinical work. Even writing in response to a short exercise can deepen your clinical practice (Naiburg 2021; Naiburg & Dobson 2021). I encourage you to write on and ‘court surprise’ (Stern 1997).

***Suzi’s response to writing exercise 1: visual representation of the Symingtons’ conceptual axis***

**Theory**

Bion’s Theories

**Concepts**

Concept of Container/Contained

Mother holding child’s pain in her mind/infant in distress

**Interpretations of/commentary on narrative material**

Patient’s pain that could not be contained: 33 years of waste, nothing,

emptiness

**Narrative details**

Contextual material: Details about patient

The immediate scene between patient and therapist

I quote from the Symingtons’ vignette in my first video. You’ll also find it in the supplementary material for that video and on pp. 174-6 in my book.

**References**

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**Additional resources**

<https://thejap.org/resources/submit-an-article>

<https://thejap.org/resources/step-by-step-guide>