


UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

Constructing Worlds – on language, learning and leadership  
Copenhagen, 20-23 Aug. 2009

Workshop  
**Coaching Psychology in a  
Narrative Perspective**

**Reinhard Stelter, PhD**  
Professor of Sport and Coaching Psychology  
Coaching Psychology Unit  
Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences  
University of Copenhagen  
Email: rstelter@ifi.ku.dk  
www.ifi.ku.dk/coaching



Dias 1

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN Reinhard Stelter

**Short presentation**



PhD in psychology. Member of the Danish Psychological Assoc.  
Accredited member of the International Society of Coaching Psychology  
Gestalt therapeutic education and further education in systemic, relational and narrative approaches to therapy, counseling, coaching and leadership

**Reinhard Stelter**

Research group leader and head of the Coaching Psychology Unit at the Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences, Univ. of Copenhagen  
Honorary Vice President of Society for Coaching Psychology and board member of EMCC - DK  
Member of the Research Advisory Panel – The Coaching Institute, Harvard University  
Member of the Advisory Board, lecturer and coach at Copenhagen Coaching Center

Dias 2

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN Reinhard Stelter

**Coaching – a definition**

- **Coaching is defined as the participation of a coach in the learning process of a coachee/group of coachees.**

---

- This process creates the foundation for new, alternative, or revised narratives of the focus person's personal and professional life.

Dias 3

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN Reinhard Stelter

**Coaching – a reflective space**

- **COACHING shall be presented** as a specific form of conversational process between a coach and a focus person – the coachee – with the aim to give the focus person a developmental space and thereby the possibility for reflection and renewed understanding:
  1. about his/her **own experiences** in relation to a specific context; and
  2. about **specific relationships**, co-ordinated actions with others and about the processes of negotiation in a specific social situation.

Dias 4

## Coaching – a dialogue with different perspectives

1. **Problem/goal perspective**  
Sportscoaching, GROW model, NLP, psychodynamic coaching, CB coaching
2. **Solution/future perspective**  
Systemic and solution-focused coaching, AI coaching; positive psychology coaching
3. **Reflective perspective**  
Social-constructionist, narrative coaching, protreptic/philosophic coaching



Dias 5

## Societal anchoring of coaching and of doing coaching

(Stelter, 2009)

We live in a world of globality (Beck, 2002)  
 ... in a hyper complex society (Luhmann, 1997)  
 ... where self-reflexivity is a basic condition (Giddens, 1999)  
 ... where identity and self-presentation are a central issue for the individual (Gergen, 2006; Keupp, 1999)

→ **Focus on meaning-making and local values af fundamental to find orientation**

→ **Coaching plays a central role in this process!**



Dias 6

## How to develop a reflective space in coaching dialogues?

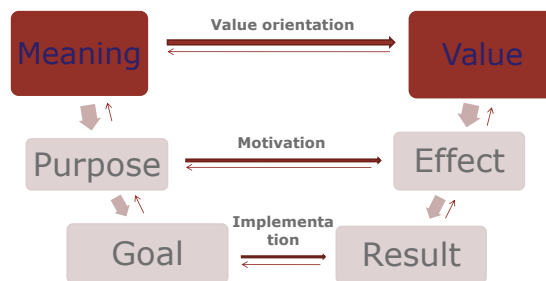
1. Focusing on **values**
2. Giving opportunities of **meaning making**
3. Revisiting the absent but **implicit**
4. Giving space to the unfolding of **narratives**



Dias 7

7

## Meanings & Values central in the concept of intentionality



Dias 8

See: Stelter, 2009

## Meaning as a central concept in coaching

- *Meaning* is fundamental, because we ascribe our experiences, actions, our interplay with others and our life and work specific values.
- Things become *meaningful*, when we understand our own way of thinking and acting, e.g., by telling specific stories about ourselves and the world we live in.
- *Meaning* is far from being the same as the term information as used in the concept of data processing. Meaning evolves in the interplay between action, sensing, reflecting and speaking

Dias 9



## Meaning as a central concept in coaching

1. Meaning is formed through the **actual experiences and (implicit) knowledge** the individual acquires in the different life contexts.
2. Meaning is shaped through **social negotiation and narratives** that describe the focus person's life practice.

Dias 10



## Integrating meaning making in two streams of coaching

This is only an analytical differentiation!

1. **Individual experiences and meaning making**  
→ **subjective reality**
  - Aesthetic focus - sensing and meaning making
  - Revisiting the absent but implicit
2. **Co-creation of meaning: Reflection, deconstruction, and development of alternative stories**  
→ **socially and co-constructed reality**
  - Co-creation of meaning and values
  - Reducing complexity - giving orientation
  - Accepting multiversality
  - Giving space to the unfolding of narratives

Dias 11



## Coaching – to uncover the implicit

Dimension of aesthetic learning (Stelter, 2008)

- **Being intentionally oriented** towards the situation
- **Focusing on the present moment**, defined as "a subjective, psychic process unit that one is aware of" (Stern, 2004)
- **Being attentive and mindful** to specific situational factors
- **Using metaphors**
- **Epoché** - freedom from prejudice and assessment – approaching the situation as it appears through your senses
- **Preparing kairos** – *the right moment* which appears in the flow of action and can be experienced by being aesthetically involved in the situation

Dias 12



## Revisiting the absent but implicit in the coaching dialogue

- The implicit is a form of knowledge which is embedded in action – but it cannot be verbalized without effort
- Making the implicit explicit opens up for new insights
- The implicit has always a bodily dimension
- Getting in touch with the implicit is always a process in the present moment and in a state of mindfulness
- A good way of getting access to the implicit is through the use of *metaphors*

Dias 13



## Revisiting the absent but implicit in the coaching dialogue

- The implicit can also be part of a reflective narrative process.
- Michael White (2000):  
“The practices of narrative therapy that contribute to options for a re-engagement with history bring forth multi-storied experiences of life and of identity.”
- Coupling the landscapes of action with the landscapes of consciousness by relating specific events to ones values and identity, both often connected to significant others that – often implicitly - had high significance and meaning.
- Process of reconnecting to the past. Linking past, present/presence and future

Dias 14



## Giving space to the unfolding of narratives in the coaching dialogue

### What is a narrative?

A story is a symbolised account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension. The story has a beginning, middle, and an ending. ... The story is held together by recognisable patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure are human predicaments and attempted resolutions.

(Sabrin, 1986, 3)

Dias 15



## Focus on the plot of the narrative

- “The plot is able to weave together a complex of events to make a single story. ... A plot is constructed in the realm of meaning, recording relationships among perceptions.” (Polkinghorn, 1988, 18)
- As the general aim of therapeutic work we can speak about the creation of a *fuller plot* that will ideally lead to a “more dynamic and thus more useful plot which serves as a powerful and connective force.” (Polkinghorn, 1988, 179)
- We also speak about making the story *thicker*

Dias 16



## Life & Self take shape through narratives

- Narratives structure the events (timeline, inner drama)
- Narratives establish coherence
- By telling stories and forming narratives, our life becomes meaningful
- In telling our life stories, we become responsible and by that ethical beings (see Kierkegaard, 1987)
- "Lives are told in being lived and lived in being told" (Carr, 1986, 61)
- Telling is the "doing" of identity (Kraus, 2006)

Dias 19



## A narrative perspective to coaching

- Coaching in a multiverse perspective → developing "landscapes of consciousness", both in individuals and groups (Michael White, 2007)
- Seeing the *landscapes of consciousness* by reflecting on one's **identity and personal and social values**
- Connecting *landscapes of consciousness* to *landscapes of action* and vice versa
- **Coupling one's own position to positions of others**
  - **Outsider witnessing**: resonating with what the coachee has put forward

Dias 20



## Questions that help to develop the narrative

- What does this experience tell you about your life?
- What is the issue or title of your story?
- What kind of personal values, attitudes and convictions lie behind this?
- What would your mother, friend [other important persons] say about that?
- Imagine that things would look like ..., how would you then feel or think?

Dias 21



## Developing alternative stories

- By focusing on exceptions
- By focusing on situations of success
- By thickening stories and coupling them with others
- By connecting stories with an experiential and embodied implicit
- By building bridges between stories and imagined future actions

Dias 22



## Coaching with outsider witnesses

(Groups of four: Coach, coachee, two outsider witnesses)

- > The coach/interviewer is guided by the following question
  - Can you remember a situation where you experienced success?
  - How would you describe the situation?
  - What was it that gave special *meaning and personal value* for you?
  - How did that experience change something in your life?
- > The two outsider witnesses talk to each other. They do not evaluate or judge what they hear, but make the coachee's reflections relevant for their own life. The outsider witness conversation is guided by the following questions:
  - What was it (of what you have heard) that you were most drawn to?
  - How does that resonate with something in your own life? What came to your mind while you listened?
  - Did you get some new thoughts about you and your life?
- > Coachee reflects about what he/she has heard

Dias 23



## References

- Beck, U. (2000). *What is globalization?* Oxford: Policy.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1987). *Either/or, Part 2*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Luhmann, N. (1997). *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.
- Gergen, K. J. (2006). *Det mættede selv – Identifikationsdilemmaer i nutiden*. Virum: Dansk Psykologisk Forlag.
- Giddens, A. (1999). *Modernitet og selvidentitet – Selvet og samfundet under sen-moderniteten*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Husserl, E. (1966). *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Keupp, H. (1999). *Identitätskonstruktionen. Das Patchwork der Identitäten in der Spätmoderne*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Polkinghorne, D. P. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Stelter, R. (2007). Coaching: A process of personal and social meaning making. *International Coaching Psychology Review* 2, 2, 191-201.
- Stelter, R. (2008). Learning in the light of the first-person approach. In T. S. S. Schilhab, M. Juelskjær & T. Moser (eds.). *The learning body* (pp. 45-65). Copenhagen: Danish University School of Education Press.
- Stelter, R. (2009). Coaching as a reflective space in a society of growing diversity - towards a narrative, postmodern paradigm. *International Coaching Psychology Review* 4, 2, 207-217.
- Stern, D. N. (2004). *The present moment in psychotherapy and everyday life*. New York: Norton.
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. New York: Norton.

Dias 24

24

