

Abstract

For this thesis there are two backgrounds: 1 systemic practice in social work, family therapy, training, coaching and consultancy, and 2 physical theatre, martial arts and other physical practices. As a starting point there is a suspicion or hunch from my own practice that systemic practice overly relies and focusses on verbal communication, missing out on the potential for change that non-verbal communication offers. This was suspected to be particularly the case after the linguistic turn that could be summarised in the sentence: Reality is created in language.

Three research questions were developed that build on each other:

1 Is there now a tendency to focus on the spoken and written word or verbal communication in the field of systemic practice?

2 If so, what are the consequences for practitioners of a focus on verbal aspects of communication?

3 Are there ways the practitioner can include non-verbal aspects of communication in a useful way?

Methodologically there are two main strands:

1 A review of the literature examines introductions to systemic practice and philosophical, sociological and linguistic trends that underpin and influence developments in systemic practice on the level of approach, to map the terrain of systemic practice. Ideas from communication theory are used to further investigate what is focussed on and what is meant by language. This review offers a new distinction of symbolic and dynamic action instead of

verbal and non-verbal communication. Using ideas from process philosophy and affect theory alongside ideas from physical theatre in a framework of metaphors, a new theoretical frame for both practice and the research of it is developed.

2 A series of workshops with systemic practitioners and practitioners from physical practices investigated how (social) reality is also created in dynamic action. These workshops were video recorded and followed up with verbal discussions with the practitioners. Earlier workshops were analysed within a social constructionist framework and later workshops were analysed to incorporate the arguments made when developing a new theoretical frame for both practice and the research of it.

Both the practical and theoretical investigations lead to answer the research questions: While practitioners might attend to dynamic action and are certainly influenced by it, this is not theorised much. The literature as well as practitioner interviews (as part of the workshops) indicate that after the linguistic turn in the field the central metaphor has changed from systems and feedback loops to language and meaning. If practitioners respond to dynamic action they do this mostly in symbolic action. But language in form of symbolic action can only ever approximate what it describes and there is a lot of potential for change in using dynamic action.

Beyond developing a theoretical frame for attending to and using dynamic action in systemic practice and systemic practitioner research, techniques for use in practice are developed. These ideas, by no means an exhaustive list, are offered as a catalogue of 'cards', brief descriptions with some thoughts in which circumstances these ideas might be useful and video examples.