Visualizing with words: Qualitative interviewing using solution-focused contextual questions

Emily Spence-Almaguer, MSW, PhD

Shlesma Chhetri

University of North Texas

Health Science Center

American Evaluation Association
2014 Conference, Denver, CO

WHAT ARE YOUR BEST HOPES FOR THIS SESSION?

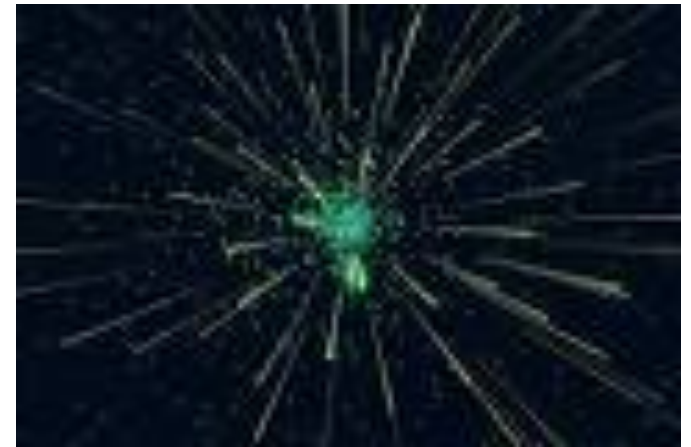## YOU HAD SO MANY CHOICES

Turn to the person sitting next to you…

WHAT WOULD MAKE THIS CONFERENCE BETTER?

Try again…

IMAGINE YOU STEPPED IN A TIME WARP PORTAL….

So what's the difference?

SOLUTION FOCUSED QUESTIONS ARE CONTEXTUAL AND SUPPORT CRITICAL REFLECTION
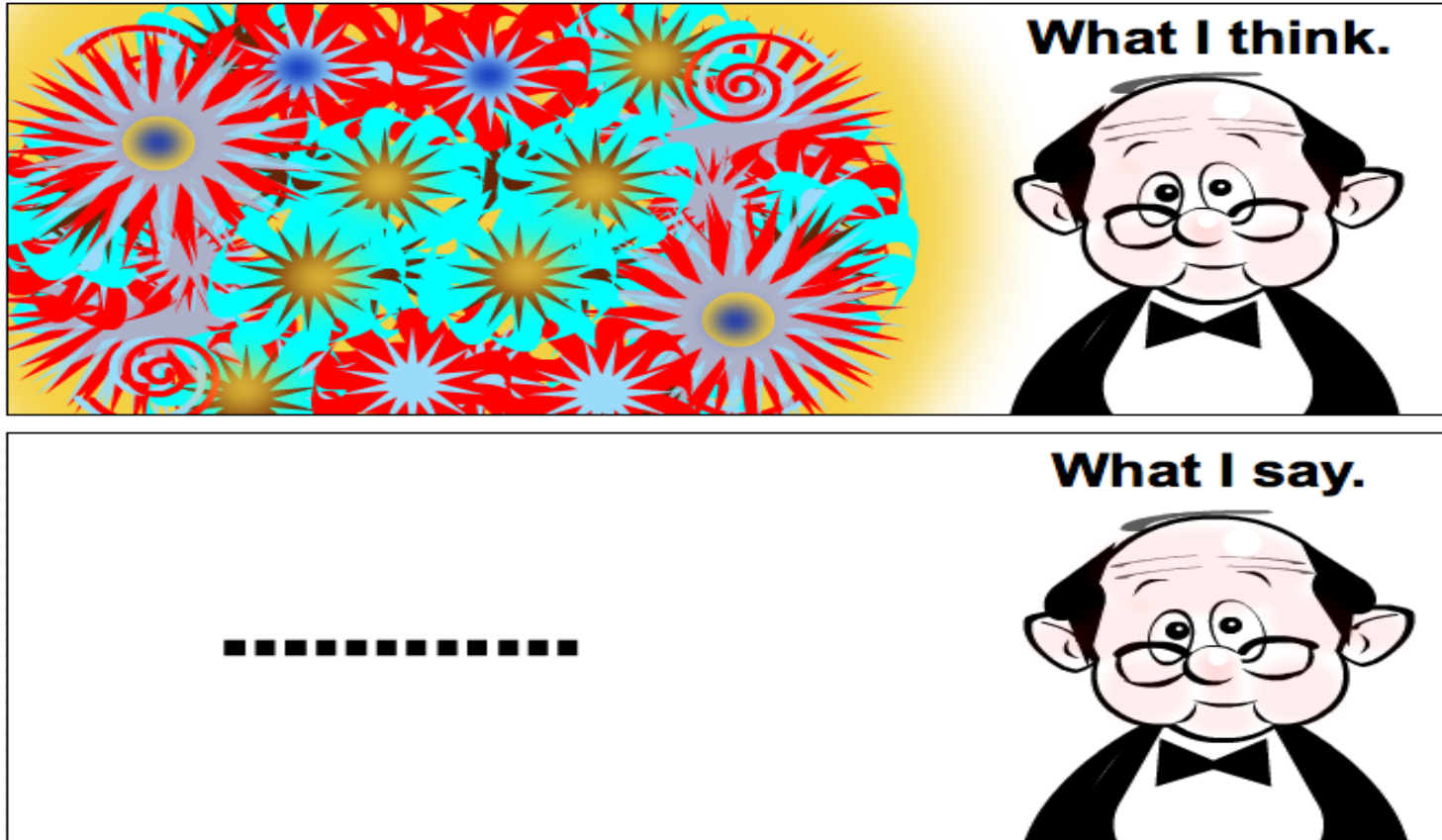
Psychoanalytic Traditions

- Interpret the unconscious
- The interpreter is the expert

VS

Solution Focused Dialogues

- People are experts on their lives
- Interviewees filter their responses based on expectations

What I think.

What I say.
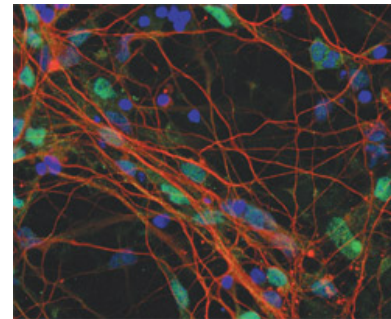
DeShazer (1994)

Data is limited or lacks depth

VS

Data is rich

- Analysis involves some conjecture due to lack of evidence – or may be overly simplified

- Themes are well-supported with behaviorally-specific examples

- Increased opportunities for triangulation of perspectives

Qualitative Data Parallels

ROOTS: Solution Focused Assumptions

- Interviewer expertise = "the art of not knowing"*

ROOTS: Solution Focused Assumptions

- People are naturally goal-directed

ROOTS: Solution Focused Assumptions

- No need to re-hash the problem in order to find the solution

ROOTS: Solution Focused Assumptions

- Identify what is working well……and do more of it

ROOTS: Solution Focused Assumptions

- Human beings are capable of great insights, no matter their age or life circumstances

Focus Group Comparisons

EXAMPLES

Program to promote financial stability among low-income families (N=5)

Traditional Question:
What would you recommend to improve the program?

"Nothing, they are dong an outstanding job."

"I don't see anything that could be better."

"Everything's been fantastic."

"[The financial coach] does a fine job. He seems into what he does."

Solution-focused question:

If I were going to give this program another $100,000 next year, what would you recommend that the program administrators do with the money?"

"Purchase a mobile bus and bring it on-site where people are."

"Put more of the [initiative's] programs together and coordinate them to make them work more effectively."

"Involve other community agencies such as the Veterans' Administration and Texas Workforce Commission."

"Find closer offices."

"Set up emergency appointments, like primary doctors….I had to wait two weeks to see someone."

Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (N=2)

Traditional Question:
How has this program impacted your family?

"My daughter's learning a lot. She's starting doing letter and numbers and I think that is good for her."

"Mine have learned a lot, they didn't read or write or do their own name. They're learning how to count, learning their colors."

Solution-focused question:

I'd like you to think about someone who is close to you who sees your kids fairly often. Do you have a parent or relative who comes by a lot? [Pause while they identify who that might be.] If I were to interview [that person] and I ask [him/her] what [he/she] notices is different, what would [he/she] tell me is different about the kids…or different about you since you started the program?

"My dad [has] been by whenever they have the classes and he really likes it a lot…. He sees the improvement that she's made. [He would say] that she's not that shy around other people. Cause she'd only seen me. My daughter's not that shy no more, where she only wants to be with mommy all the time. She ventures out a little bit more."

"[He would notice] that I sing songs. I didn't know any rhymes in English…. Now he notices that I can tell her little stories and rhymes and stuff to make her learn, to help her learn her numbers."

"They learn how to speak more English. My dad tried to communicate with them in English. My little girl, she is shy too. They notice she is speaking more. Both [kids] were shy, they wouldn't go by nobody. We would get there and they would just stick by me. Now when we go to my parent's house , he runs around and goes and wakes up his Grandpa. They tell me that they [the kids] have changed alot."

"I'm doing more activities with them. Taking them out and doing activities has helped a lot, instead of being at home and just watching tv or letting them play outside. Like this past weekend we took them to the zoo"

SKILLS

SOLUTION FOCUSED DIALOGUE SKILLS

Skills: Introduction

- Set the stage to elevate participant's expertise
- Prepare them for some crazy and unusual questions

Skills: Scaling

- 1 to 10 scaling of anything and everything

- Key Skills:
  - Reflecting backward to determine "how they did it", "How did you manage…"
  - Reflecting forward to determine what's next
  - Be willing to extend past the scale

Imaginary Scenarios

- Turn the traditional into a contextual imaginary scenarios (e.g., turn recommendations into "you are an advisory board member…")

- Key skills:
  - Verbally create a visual image of the context (time, setting, actors)
  - Validate their expertise
  - Bring "familiar observers" into the scenario (e.g., family member, supervisor, teacher, etc…)
  - Pausing for reflection

Compliment & Explore Strengths

- Programs + People = Change

- Key skills:
  - Observing skill and competence
  - Investigative and critical curiosity
  - "What is going well??"

Skills: The Miracle Question

- Visualizing the future

- Key skills:
  - Creating imagery
  - Pausing during the question to allow the images to take hold
  - Probing with "what else"

Literature References & Other Resources

- de Shazer, S..(1994). Words were originally magic . WW Norton & Co.

- de Shazer, S., Dolan, Y.(2007). More than Miracles: The State of the Art of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy . Haworth Press.

- Gaiswinkler, W. & Roessler, M. (2009). Using the expertise of knowing and the expertise of not-knowing to support processes of empowerment in social work practice. Journal of Social Work Practice, 23 (2), 215-227.

- Metcalf, L. (2003) Teaching Toward Solutions, 2nd Ed. Prentice Hall, NY.

- Visser, C.F. (2011). Testing the Association between solution-focused coaching and client perceived coaching outcomes. InterAction 3 (2), 9-27.

Art/Image References

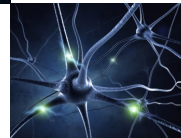- Smashingshowcase.com, Sergio Albiac

- Mauvedinosaur.blogspot.com
- www.teknews.us
- W3.unisa.edu.au
- www.ecat.edu.ac.uk