

## The Tree of Life: A review of the collective narrative approach

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### Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on the Tree of Life (ToL), a psychosocial support tool underpinned by narrative therapy. Originally developed to support vulnerable children in East and Southern Africa, ToL draws on the metaphor of a tree, taken from Zimbabwean folklore and collective narrative practice to support groups and communities to overcome difficult life experiences. The aim is to inform practitioners of the key elements of the approach and to inform educational psychology practice.

### Introduction

Narrative therapy is based on the idea that problems are manufactured and/or maintained in social, cultural or political contexts (White, M. & Epston, 1990). Lives and relationships can be shaped by the stories people develop to give meaning to the experience (White, C. & Denborough, 1998). People who experience hardship in certain cultures may be viewed by themselves and others as failures and consequently create stories of themselves that portray a lack of power or worth (Etchison & Kleist, 2000). The existing research indicates a need for flexible psychosocial support tools for children and adults who have had difficult life histories, where conventional forms of therapy may not be successfully accessed. The Tree of Life is a collective narrative tool (Denborough, 2012) that aims to promote a feeling of identity and connectedness and allows an opportunity for people to re-author their stories.

A new record high of 46.3 million people were being helped by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as of mid-2014, 3.4 million more than at the end of 2013 (UNHCR, 2014). Children under 18 years constituted 51 percent of the refugee population in 2014, the highest figure in a decade (UNHCR). Due to conflict and persecution,

refugees are forced to seek protection elsewhere, with developing countries hosting 86 percent of refugees (UNHCR, 2014). With feelings of disempowerment, loss of community and potential language and culture barriers, as well as changes they experience in their family, community and society, refugees are vulnerable to a range of psychosocial problems (Reed, Fazel, Jones, Panter-Brick & Stein, 2012).

Adjustments to manage the many uncertainties of this rapidly changing international environment are being made with government initiatives and policy in both education and health. These policies inform psychologists on how to include socially disadvantaged community groups and how best to apply their skills in order to meet the needs of young refugees within both school and community settings (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). However, little is known about which theoretical models or strategies are most effective (Hodes, 2000), and limited programmes have been evaluated in a school setting with even fewer designed for immigrant or refugee children (Kataoka, et al., 2003).

Despite the difficulties and challenges refugees face, many refugee children are extremely resilient and do well in school (Rutter, 2003). However, children who pose particular concerns may benefit from a variety of psychological interventions that specifically address their psychosocial and emotional needs (Fazel & Stein, 2003; O'Shea, Hodes, Down & Bramley, 2000). Schools can provide the ideal setting for interventions to address the need of refugee children, as in most countries children can access and attend school, and within a disruptive environment a school can be a stable foundation. Schools can facilitate early identification and provide interventions to maximise cognitive, emotional and social development (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014). If school-based interventions are failing to create positive emotional change and improvements in learning, psychosocial support groups can be effective (German & Ehntholt, 2007). Psychosocial support groups can be a particularly powerful form of help as they provide social contact for adolescents who are usually isolated and struggle to build trusting relationships

(German & Ehntholt, 2007). In order to reach the maximum amount of people and provide cost-effective interventions, group-based programmes may have the potential to be more relevant (Schweitzer, Vromans, Ranke & Griffin, 2014).

The Tree of Life (ToL), designed by Ncube (2006) in Zimbabwe, was developed to support vulnerable children. ToL uses metaphors and questions to encourage individuals to tell stories that empower them and to hear stories of hope, strength and shared values, as well as encouraging community connectedness. The tool was originally designed for children and young people, although it has been adapted to meet the needs of individuals, in many other contexts. ToL however has received almost no scholarly attention.

This paper aims to critically review current research to understand the theoretical underpinnings of ToL, explore the effectiveness of the tool when working with children, young people and adults who have experienced difficult life histories, and discuss future implications for research. The paper starts by explaining the background and development of ToL, including an introduction to narrative therapy. The literature review provides a critique of the evidence base for ToL and outlines the research into the applied practice of ToL both with children and young people and with adults. The paper ends with a discussion about the future of ToL and its implications for professionals working with children and young people.

## Tree of Life: Background

The concept of a 'Tree of Life' has many connotations and has been used in biology, philosophy, mythology and religion, hence the 'tree of life' is found to be a widespread metaphor. The ToL tool developed by Ncube includes a focus on life and identity facilitated through conversations.

The ToL technique has shown positive effects when working with vulnerable Zimbabwean children and those affected with HIV (Ncube, 2006). Research on ToL also includes Vietnamese refugees in Australia (Read, 2010), African and Caribbean men in Hackney, London (Byrne et al., 2011), Liberian refugees in Australia (Schweitzer et al., 2014), an intervention in a north London school (German, 2013), as well as parents described as 'hard to reach' in Camden (Hughes, 2014) and the use of ToL as a tool to increase utilisation of mental health services by Latinos in the US (Méndez & Cole, 2014). ToL includes methods such as recognising that the individual is an expert of their own lives and recognising personal resources and

strengths (De Shazer, Dolan & Korman, 2007), which is also a main principle in solution-focused approaches.

## Narrative therapy and ToL

ToL is a relatively new psychosocial strengths intervention. It draws on the concepts of collective narrative practice, an approach that aims to respond to groups or communities who have experienced social suffering in contexts where 'therapy' may not be culturally resonant (Denborough, 2012). Collective narrative practice is underpinned by the key aspects of narrative therapy, providing a context for addressing a range of social issues, including social justice, as well as aims to enhance social inclusion and community cohesion (White, M. & Epston, 1990). Narrative therapy is based upon the rationale that our self-identities are shaped by our own accounts of our lives and the stories we tell about ourselves (White, M. & Epston, 1990) and involves several key propositions. Below are the three narrative principles most recognisable in ToL.

## Deconstruction of dominant problem stories

It is invariably the case that efforts to directly address people's experience of trauma by encouraging them to revisit this are unproductive at best, and in many circumstances, hazardous. Such efforts can contribute to experiences of re-traumatisation... (White, D., 2004, p.71).

However, narrative therapy, with its social constructionist foundation and sequential diversity (ability to discuss the past, present or future), is specifically fitting for providing people with opportunities to give a voice to their traumas, evaluate their interpretations, reconsider their identity, draw conclusions and re-author their lives (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007).

Participating in the re-telling of a person's story helps to bring life and significance to them, making it possible for individuals to re-author their lives to preferred ways of being in the world (Bruner, 1986; White, M. & Epston, 1990).

## Development and enrichment of preferred stories

Narrative therapy allows individuals to explore alternative stories of self. White, M. & Epston (1990) explain that

dominant discourses and experiences associated with refugee life can become internalised, developing maladaptive or 'problem self-stories' about themselves that prevent them from living up to their preferred narrative. Narrative therapy and ToL is able to develop alternative narratives and give a voice to marginalised explanations and culturally congruent ways of coping, as well as identifying strengths and resilience.

### Living and witnessing of preferred stories

When someone is endeavouring to author new stories about their lives, stories that are free from the constraining effects of various problems, outsider witnesses help to acknowledge these identity claims as valid (Carey & Russell, 2003). This creates opportunities for clients to experience themselves and their preferred identity as part of a community of acknowledgement (Carey & Russell, 2003). Sometimes 'it takes an audience to solve a problem' (Lobovits, Maisel & Freeman, 1995, p.255). Outsider witness plays a big role in ToL.

### Developing the Tree of Life

The Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) is a non-governmental organisation that focuses on promoting psychosocial care for children affected by HIV and Aids across East and Southern Africa. The ToL tool was developed by Ncube to help her work at REPSSI as an alternative way of supporting children and to help them deal with loss, bereavement and grief. Ncube made changes to the original ToL approach through engagement with narrative therapy ideas in 2005 with the assistance of David Denborough. ToL was further developed into a tool for enabling children to develop a second story about their lives. The main elements of the tree were adapted to incorporate the narrative approaches; **roots** (origin, family, ancestry, culture), **ground** (place of residence, hobbies), **trunk** (skills, memories), **branches** (hopes, dreams, wishes), **leaves** (important people) and **fruits** (gifts) (Ncube, 2006).

Table 1 shows German's (2013) adaptation of Ncube's tree elements and the four-part process suggested by Denborough (Ncube, 2006; see also Appendix 1):

- Part 1: Drawing the Tree of Life and re-telling
- Part 2: Forest of Life
- Part 3: When the storms come
- Part 4: Certificate

Table 1: Four-part process of the Tree of Life

Phase/process Part 1: Creating the trees	Questions to ask while the child is describing the tree	Additional activities
<p><b>Preparation</b></p> <p>Introductions to the project and what it is about. Introduce concept that looking at our cultures and backgrounds are our strengths, which enables positive emotional wellbeing. Part of PHSE curriculum.</p> <p>This exercise based on the idea of using the tree as a metaphor: Think of your life as a tree.</p> <p>Emphasise that the children need to talk a lot with their family cultural explorers journalists.</p>	<p>Introductions: Facilitating team teacher, assistant and EP.</p> <p>Ask children what they think a psychologist is.</p> <p>Explain role of a psychologist being interested in enabling people to identify their strengths in order to enhance positive emotional wellbeing.</p> <p>Setting up group rules with the class.</p> <p>Invite children to contribute to the list.</p> <p>Setting up a safe place to share stories and learn from each other.</p> <p>Facilitators share their favourite tree and why, and ask a few children to share.</p> <p>Facilitators have brought in something from their cultural background and share the story of their 'name' and invite children who know the story to share.</p>	<p>Warm-up Circle game:</p> <p><u>Tree memory game.</u></p> <p>Each person introduces their name and favourite tree and next person in the circle will repeat the name and favourite tree of the previous person and then say their name and their favourite tree. The last person has to repeat all the names and trees of the previous people.</p> <p>Children are asked to sit in pairs and find out about their favourite tree, using books and IT. Exercise to help them become familiar with trees and various parts. Children share what they have found out about their partner's tree.</p> <p>Deconstruction exercise:</p> <p>Brainstorming meaning of culture with flipchart as prompt for general discussion.</p> <p>Task for next week and for duration of project. Teacher sets class task of discussing with their family their background and bringing in family genograms.</p> <p>Children asked to bring in something from their cultural background.</p>

<p><b>Roots</b></p> <p>Where I come from?</p> <p>My family, origins, family name, ancestry, extended family?</p> <p>Those who have taught you most in your life?</p> <p>Favourite home?</p> <p>Special, treasured family song, dance?</p> <p>Food this special? Family motto or sayings?</p> <p>Important people can be from your history, they may have passed away but can still be included.</p>	<p>For each root the child draws, writes an aspect.</p> <p>Pairs are encouraged to help each other with spelling and take an interest in each other's drawing.</p> <p>Facilitators move around the class helping the children and asking genuine questions about what they have drawn or written.</p> <p>Children can draw any type of tree and can be as creative as they wish, in use of colours and style.</p>	<p>Reading of group rules.</p> <p>Reminding the children of the project and where we are up to.*</p> <p>Sharing of cultural artefacts and the stories behind them.**</p> <p>Particular family member invited in to speak.</p> <p>Sharing of family genogram worked on at home (most parents wanted to help their children with this and brought in detailed and colourful genograms).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is done in each session.</li> </ul> <p>** Different children chosen each week to share artefact from home.</p>
<p><b>Ground</b></p> <p>Present situation.</p> <p>Where I live now.</p> <p>Activities I am engaged with in daily life.</p> <p>Hobbies.</p>	<p>For example, school, church, mosque.</p> <p>Football club, dancing class.</p>	<p><u>Deconstruction exercise:</u></p> <p>Children invited to think about what it means to be a refugee/economic migrant.</p> <p>Ideas recorded on flip chart.</p> <p>Children encouraged to identify strengths that emerge during the exercise.</p>
<p><b>Trunk</b></p> <p><b>Skills and abilities</b></p> <p>What skills are you good at?</p> <p>What other skills do you have? (soft skills) cooking, cleaning, helping your parents, etc.</p> <p>Skills of loving, caring, sharing, supporting family members.</p> <p>Supporting a friend against bullies, racism.</p>	<p>Within the trunk children can use arrows or draw in tree bark their skills or symbols.</p> <p>Encourage the children to talk about what they do in their daily lives and the skills that they use.</p> <p>Point out skills that you have noticed in the session, for example sharing, listening.</p> <p><i>How long have you had those skills?</i></p> <p><i>Did you learn those skills from anyone in particular?</i></p> <p>Encourage the children to tell stories about their skills.</p>	<p>Deconstruction exercise:</p> <p>Children invited to offer their understanding of what it means to appreciate. Ideas recorded on flip chart.</p> <p>Appreciative Inquiry exercise in pairs.</p> <p>Children are given post-it notes and asked to think about three different things that they appreciate about their partner and give the notes as gifts to stick on their partner. The children can have more than three notes if they think of other things.</p>

<p><b>Branches</b></p> <p>Hopes, dreams and wishes that you have for your life.</p>	<p>While the children are drawing the branches facilitators can ask questions to learn more about the child's hopes and dreams.</p> <p><i>How long have you had these hopes and dreams?</i></p> <p><i>How are these linked to significant people in your life?</i></p> <p><i>How have you managed to hold onto these dreams?</i></p> <p><i>What has sustained your hopes?</i></p>	<p>In pairs share with each other then volunteers are asked to share with the whole class.</p>
<p><b>Leaves</b></p> <p>Important people in your life. People you value or hold precious In your life. May have passed away or living but they are still important in your life. They make 'your heart warm'.</p>	<p><i>Why are these people special to you?</i></p> <p>Explain that just because people are no longer alive, it does not mean they are not still very important to us.</p> <p>If a child becomes upset about someone who has died the following questions may help:</p> <p><i>Did you have a lovely time with this person?</i></p> <p><i>What was special about this person?</i></p> <p><i>Would this person like it that you remember them in these ways?</i></p>	<p>Questions are asked that invite the child to tell stories about what is/was significant about their relationship. They can contribute to an honouring of this relationship.</p>
<p><b>Fruit/flowers</b></p> <p>Gifts you have received from important people in your life.</p>	<p>Explain that these are not necessarily material gifts. Gifts of being cared for, being loved, kindness.</p> <p><i>Why do you think the person gave you this?</i></p> <p><i>What did they appreciate about you that would have led them to do this?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think you might have contributed to their life?</i></p>	

<p><b>Part 2 and 4 combined</b></p> <p><u>Forest of Life/ Celebration and Evaluation/Tree of Life Certificate award ceremony</u></p>		
<p>Completed trees are displayed around the classroom. Children are given post-it notes to write words of encouragement, support and appreciation on first their partner's tree then to choose another tree different from their own.</p> <p>Facilitators look around and comment on the forest of life that surrounds him/her and all the participants. Where parents have been invited they can also add post-it notes and other guests (head teacher, etc.).</p> <p>Facilitator appreciates the forest pointing out the wealth of cultural diversity in the roots, richness of skills and wealth of dreams and hopes for the future in the class's forest of life.</p> <p>Evaluation: Class are asked what they liked about the project, what surprised them, what could have been better. Whether this was a useful project for the school.</p> <p>Head or deputy head teacher awards the children with their individual certificates that records their: skills, abilities, dreams and hopes for the future, special people they want to appreciate in life. This is read out.</p>		
<p><b>Part 3: Storms of Life</b></p>	<p><b>Questions</b></p>	<p><b>Additional activities</b></p>
<p>Just as trees and forests can face storms and hazards in their life, some people also experience difficulties and challenges in life. The class are invited to think about these challenges and how they can respond.</p> <p>Encourage the collective voice of the class not necessarily individual stories.</p> <p>Encourage the sharing of children's knowledge, skills and abilities.</p>	<p><i>As beautiful as the trees and forests might be, are they free from danger and hazards?</i></p> <p><i>What hazards can trees face?</i></p> <p><i>We have likened our lives to those beautiful trees in the forest. Would we be right to say that, like those trees in the forest, children can also face dangers and troubles in their lives?</i></p> <p><i>Discuss the effects of these difficulties on children's lives.</i></p> <p><i>Is it the fault of the trees? Is it the fault of the children? Can ask how animals respond to storms.</i></p> <p><i>Can ask how animals respond to storms.</i></p> <p><i>These are the ways animals respond to storms, what about how children respond to storms that come into their lives?</i></p> <p><i>Are there other ways children can respond? Are there things that they can do?</i></p> <p><i>How can they protect themselves?</i></p>	<p>List the hazards for the trees.</p> <p>List the difficulties the children name.</p> <p>List the effects.</p> <p>List the responses.</p> <p>Are the storms always present?</p> <p>What do we do when storms have passed?</p>

## The Tree of Life: Children and young people

The process of the ToL in relation to its effectiveness when working with children and young people was

originally explored by Ncube (2006) and subsequently adapted by German (2013) and Schweitzer et al. (2014).

German (2013) took the ToL approach and explored its use in a mainstream education setting as a whole-class intervention. The study took place in a North London primary school that has a diverse ethnic and socio-



economic population. Contact with the school was made as there was a request for self-esteem interventions with a group of Somali children; however, as the parents believed singling their children out would contribute to the issue, it was decided a whole-class approach would be more beneficial.

German's study used a mixed-methods approach to explore the process and outcomes of ToL. A single group repeat measure design was used combining pre and post-intervention, qualitative self-rating measures and qualitative interview data. The sample consisted of 29 pupils aged nine to ten years, all of whom attended the same school. The ToL was administered over eight 90-minute sessions, and post-evaluation interviews took place the following term. Results showed a significant difference between pre and post scores for self-concept and a significant increase in overall ratings of cultural knowledge. Her paper showed that ToL can be used to look at inequalities, including racism, and reports that 34 percent of the class felt there was less racism after the eight sessions. German also developed a guide to describe the ToL process that can be shared and inform future practice (German, 2013).

Vromans, Ranke & Schweitzer (n.d.) have also developed a ToL facilitator manual; however, to date this is unpublished. In Schweitzer's pilot study he aimed to deliver this manualised ToL programme to a group of young Liberian refugees in Australia to explore the therapeutic process and the participants' experience of the ToL. Schweitzer included four females and four males, aged between 12 and 17 years, including a case study of one of the male participants. All participants could speak and understand English and all took part in seven 80-minute ToL sessions. Schweitzer made observation notes about the group, particular observation notes of the case study as well as reflections.

Although these studies cannot be directly compared due to the varying approaches and measures, these studies they have shown ToL to be an effective psychosocial group-based treatment approach. It can be effective in situations where individuals have experienced adversities and challenges, as well as a versatile tool that uses narrative theory and strengths-based approaches to work with children and to provide support and inform the people around the child. This research provides a foundation to which further research can contribute.

ToL lends itself as an intervention or assessment tool and can be used as a preventative measure, facilitating

education and contact between communities and cultures.

ToL has potential to be a useful tool for practitioners working with children in all settings to create a feeling of community connectedness and identity. Schweitzer found that the ToL assisted directly in the development of self-narratives and the ability to reflect: 'The Tree of Life may be beneficial in assisting young people from refugee backgrounds to heal psychologically post trauma' (Schweitzer, 2014, p.25). However, Schweitzer states that, although the ToL is hypothesised to assist in the healing of post-traumatic stress, it is not a substitute for individual therapy in young people demonstrating symptoms of distress. Although not all young people from refugee backgrounds will require individualised therapy, for those who do, ToL is recommended as an addendum (Schweitzer et al., 2014).

## The Tree of Life: Adults

### Breaking barriers to help seeking

The papers so far have discussed the effectiveness of ToL when working with children and young people. The approach is now considered in the context of the adult population. One key topic identified from the literature was that of the ability to break down barriers to help seeking (Byrne et al., 2011; Hughes, 2014; Méndez & Cole, 2014).

Méndez and Cole's (2014) paper looked at the underutilisation of mental health services by Latinos, despite an increasing Latino population in the US. They identify a need for a culturally sensitive service that incorporates the values and culture of the individual or family that it is currently engaging. Hughes (2014) presents research from the Tavistock & Portman NHS Trust addressing issues around engagement with mental health services with the refugee community in Camden, North London. She explains that refugee children in Camden are among those who have the lowest attendance and levels of academic achievement. Byrne et al. (2011) followed on from the 'Trailblazer' research conducted by Carlin (2009) focusing on why African and Caribbean men continue to be overrepresented among those detained under the Mental Health Act (Care Quality Commission, 2011) and underrepresented among those receiving talking therapies (Keating, 2007).

All three papers focus on how to avoid alienating and disempowering those who seek help and highlight the importance of trust and the relationship between the client and therapist when accessing services. Without trust and



cultural competency in therapy, active engagement in the process could break down. Hughes addresses the specific needs of the Camden refugee community and attempts to 'bridge the gap' between communities and mental health services. Méndez and Cole (2014) also identify the need to 'bridge the gap', and explained that Latinos prefer to self-disclose with people who hold similar beliefs and values. Individuals seeking counselling or mental health services may be searching for a practitioner who is willing to accept and value their customs and beliefs. Méndez and Cole describe ToL as a technique that could be used by therapists to gather cultural values and discover important family support systems. This initial dialogue would allow the therapist to be more informed of the family's cultural perspective, and in turn may allow the family to become more engaged in the process.

Hughes (2014), Méndez and Cole (2014), and Byrne et al. (2011) all discuss the ways the ToL approach can address these issues and promote utilisation of mental health services by all cultures. Western models of mental health can be culturally inappropriate and can marginalise cultural discourses about how mental health is understood, thereby undermining the very identity of the people in need of assistance (Hughes, 2014). Byrne et al. (2011) report the levels of racism and lack of respect experienced by African and Caribbean men, and their concerns about white therapists' ability to understand and support them. The high dropout rates in talking therapies within the African and Caribbean communities also shows that current mental health services are not meeting the needs of the population (Rathod, Kingdon, Smith & Turkington, 2005).

### Limitations and strengths

There were some limitations discussed in the three papers, Méndez and Cole (2014) also consider that ToL may not be suitable for families who are in 'crisis' as immediate needs may need to be met first. This review however does explore the use of ToL in family therapy and 'wraparound services', with components of acculturation and provides interesting points indicating ToL can be beneficial in therapy. Families can express their cultural background and values during the session, which gives the therapist context in which to view the problem, and families feel respected and more likely to seek help and self-disclose due to a non-judgemental and culturally sensitive environment.

Hughes (2014) aimed to show ToL as a way of integrating cultural understanding and norms; however, Hughes could

have gained more attendance from teachers and other parents as well as the mothers, as this would have allowed more of an increase in understanding of views and experiences, and created stronger community links. Hughes provided qualitative data that shows ToL to be an approach providing access to refugee communities who might not otherwise use CAMHS. This may be due to lack of knowledge about what is available, stigma associated with mental health or services and language barriers that may hinder the development of trusting relationships.

The papers recognised that systemic and holistic services can provide positive change; taking services out of the clinic and non-clinical settings and into the community, or in schools facilitated the attendance of parents and families. Méndez's indicates that involving family members, community and education personnel in 'wraparound services' are beneficial in moving the family and individual towards a positive future.

Being heard, understood, affirmed and recognised as autonomous are universally valued. As ToL has its roots in narrative therapy, which aims to encompass all these elements as well as believing individuals are an expert on themselves, ToL has the potential to work successfully cross-culturally and worldwide. Byrne (2011) mentions how the African and Caribbean men she worked with agreed that being listened to in a non-judgemental way and treated with respect was more important than ethnicity.

### Implications for educational psychology work

Educational psychologists (EPs) work within schools, families and communities, which makes them well placed to have an active role in reviewing policies and researching new ways of applying psychology to reduce 'thin descriptions' and dominant negative discourses of individuals and groups. The research has shown the ToL can be used with children and adults with positive outcomes, and has potential to be a tool used to reduce the amount of people labelled as 'hard to reach' as it allows the development of a safe place to manage feelings and experiences, to feel valued, respected and understood. These elements are needed to 'bridge the gap' between services and communities and also children and their peers.

The new code of practice (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2014) has stressed the importance of the voice of the child and person-planning. ToL is a tool

that could potentially fit very well with this new approach as there is emphasis on children and young people expressing their views and strengths. The use of art and drawing in ToL is an inclusive tool that is non-threatening and advocated by the 1989 United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (German, 2013), and due to the visual nature of ToL tool there is potential for working successfully with pre-verbal children.

The current literature discusses the use of the ToL with adults, children, schools and services, however there was not much research that discussed using ToL with families. The ToL could be an effective way to open up communications and understanding within families, potentially a useful resource for EPs when working with a variety of within-family issues. German (2013) suggests future research should include more involvement of staff and families in order to encourage a sense of school community and develop further understanding of children's experiences. Also exploring the effectiveness of ToL as a tool to be used as a school exchange activity has been advocated by Ajegbo (2007) and DfCSF (2007), aiming to develop guidance and advice for developing community cohesion, challenging racism and radical thinking.

## Conclusion

This review has explored how ToL is underpinned by narrative theory, and evidence-based principles. ToL is a flexible psychosocial, narrative approach that can be adapted to work with various populations to break barriers to help-seeking and support community connectedness, as well as with children and young people in various settings. The versatility of the tool means that it can lend itself as an assessment tool or as an intervention strategy to hear the 'voice of the child', which could inform future work with children and young people.

With increasingly diverse communities, individuals, especially children, require an opportunity to create preferred self-narratives and capacity for reflection in order to forge meaning and build identity (Solomon, 2014). It is hoped that this review adds to the knowledge of beneficial methods of working with children, young people and adults who require an opportunity to help themselves move forward unhindered by past experiences.

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## Appendix 1

### Part 1: Drawing the Tree of Life and re-telling



Part 2: Forest of Life



Part 4: Certificates

*Tree of Life certificate*

*Awarded to:* \_\_\_\_\_

*For proving to herself and to others that she has many skills and abilities that help to give her strength in her life.*

*She also has special dreams and hopes for the future.*

\_\_\_\_\_ *skills and abilities include* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Her hopes and dreams are* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *She would like*

*to appreciate the following special people in her life:*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Date:*

\_\_\_\_\_ *Signature:*



Table 1: Four-part process of the Tree of Life

Phase/process <b>Part 1: Creating the trees</b>	Questions to ask while the child is describing the tree	Additional activities
<p><b>Preparation</b></p> <p>Introductions to the project and what it is about. Introduce concept that looking at our cultures and backgrounds are our strengths, which enables positive emotional wellbeing. Part of PHSE curriculum.</p> <p>This exercise based on the idea of using the tree as a metaphor: Think of your life as a tree.</p> <p>Emphasise that the children need to talk a lot with their family cultural explorers journalists.</p>	<p>Introductions: Facilitating team teacher, assistant and EP.</p> <p>Ask children what they think a psychologist is.</p> <p>Explain role of a psychologist being interested in enabling people to identify their strengths in order to enhance positive emotional wellbeing.</p> <p>Setting up group rules with the class.</p> <p>Invite children to contribute to the list.</p> <p>Setting up a safe place to share stories and learn from each other.</p> <p>Facilitators share their favourite tree and why, and ask a few children to share.</p> <p>Facilitators have brought in something from their cultural background and share the story of their 'name' and invite children who know the story to share.</p>	<p>Warm-up Circle game: <u>Tree memory game.</u></p> <p>Each person introduces their name and favourite tree and next person in the circle will repeat the name and favourite tree of the previous person and then say their name and their favourite tree. The last person has to repeat all the names and trees of the previous people.</p> <p>Children are asked to sit in pairs and find out about their favourite tree, using books and IT. Exercise to help them become familiar with trees and various parts. Children share what they have found out about their partners tree.</p> <p>Deconstruction exercise: Brainstorming meaning of culture with flipchart as prompt for general discussion.</p> <p>Task for next week and for duration of project. Teacher sets class task of discussing with their family their background and bringing in family genograms.</p> <p>Children asked to bring in something from their cultural background.</p>
<p><b>Roots</b></p> <p>Where I come from?</p> <p>My family, origins, family name, ancestry, extended family?</p> <p>Those who have taught you most in your life?</p> <p>Favourite home?</p> <p>Special, treasured family song, dance?</p> <p>Food this special? Family motto or sayings</p> <p>Important people can be from your history, they may have passed away but can still be included.</p>	<p>For each root the child draws, writes an aspect.</p> <p>Pairs are encouraged to help each other with spelling and take an interest in each other's drawing.</p> <p>Facilitators move around the class helping the children and asking genuine questions about what they have drawn or written.</p> <p>Children can draw any type of tree and can be as creative as they wish, in use of colours and style.</p>	<p>Reading of group rules.</p> <p>Reminding the children of the project and where we are up to.*</p> <p>Sharing of cultural artefacts and the stories behind them.**</p> <p>Particular family member invited in to speak.</p> <p>Sharing of family genogram worked on at home (most parents wanted to help their children with this and brought in detailed and colourful genograms).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is done in each session.</li> </ul> <p>** Different children chosen each week to share artefact from home.</p>

<p><b>Ground</b></p> <p>Present situation.</p> <p>Where I live now.</p> <p>Activities I am engaged with in daily life.</p> <p>Hobbies.</p>	<p>For example, school, church, mosque.</p> <p>Football club, dancing class.</p>	<p><u>Deconstruction exercise:</u></p> <p>Children invited to think about what it means to be a refugee/economic migrant.</p> <p>Ideas recorded on flip chart.</p> <p>Children encouraged to identify strengths that emerge during the exercise.</p>
<p><b>Trunk</b></p> <p><b>Skills and abilities</b></p> <p>What skills are you good at?</p> <p>What other skills do you have? (soft skills) cooking, cleaning, helping your parents, etc.</p> <p>Skills of loving, caring, sharing, supporting family members.</p> <p>Supporting a friend against bullies, racism.</p>	<p>Within the trunk children can use arrows or draw in tree bark their skills or symbols.</p> <p>Encourage the children to talk about what they do in their daily lives and the skills that they use.</p> <p>Point out skills that you have noticed in the session, for example sharing, listening.</p> <p><i>How long have you had those skills?</i></p> <p><i>Did you learn those skills from anyone in particular?</i></p> <p>Encourage the children to tell stories about their skills.</p>	<p>Deconstruction exercise:</p> <p>Children invited to offer their understanding of what it means to appreciate. Ideas recorded on flip chart.</p> <p>Appreciative Inquiry exercise in pairs.</p> <p>Children are given post-it notes and asked to think about three different things that they appreciate about their partner and give the notes as gifts to stick on their partner. The children can have more than three notes if they think of other things.</p>
<p><b>Branches</b></p> <p>Hopes, dreams and wishes that you have for your life.</p>	<p>While the children are drawing the branches facilitators can ask questions to learn more about the child's hopes and dreams.</p> <p><i>How long have you had these hopes and dreams?</i></p> <p><i>How are these linked to significant people in your life?</i></p> <p><i>How have you managed to hold onto these dreams?</i></p> <p><i>What has sustained your hopes?</i></p>	<p>In pairs share with each other then volunteers are asked to share with the whole class.</p>
<p><b>Leaves</b></p> <p>Important people in your life. People you value or hold precious In your life. May have passed away or living but they are still important in your life. They make 'your heart warm'.</p>	<p>Why are these people special to you?</p> <p>Explain that just because people are no longer alive, it does not mean they are not still very important to us.</p> <p>If a child becomes upset about someone who has died the following questions may help:</p> <p><i>Did you have a lovely time with this person?</i></p> <p><i>What was special about this person?</i></p> <p><i>Would this person like it that you remember them in these ways?</i></p>	<p>Questions are asked that invite the child to tell stories about what is/was significant about their relationship. They can contribute to an honouring of this relationship.</p>

<p><b>Fruit/flowers</b></p> <p>Gifts you have received from important people in your life.</p>	<p>Explain that these are not necessarily material gifts. Gifts of being cared for, being loved, kindness.</p> <p><i>Why do you think the person gave you this?</i></p> <p><i>What did they appreciate about you that would have led them to do this?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think you might have contributed to their life?</i></p>	
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**Part 2 and 4 combined**

Forest of Life/ Celebration and Evaluation/Tree of Life Certificate award ceremony

Completed trees are displayed around the classroom. Children are given post-it notes to write words of encouragement, support and appreciation on first their partner’s tree then to choose another tree different from their own.

Facilitators look around and comment on the forest of life that surrounds him/her and all the participants. Where parents have been invited they can also add post-it notes and other guests (head teacher, etc.).

Facilitator appreciates the forest pointing out the wealth of cultural diversity in the roots, richness of skills and wealth of dreams and hopes for the future in the class’s forest of life.

Evaluation: Class are asked what they liked about the project, what surprised them, what could have been better.

Whether this was a useful project for the school.

Head or deputy head teacher awards the children with their individual certificates that records their: skills, abilities, dreams and hopes for the future, special people they want to appreciate in life. This is read out.

<b>Part 3: Storms of Life</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Additional activities</b>
<p>Just as trees and forests can face storms and hazards in their life, some people also experience difficulties and challenges in life. The class are invited to think about these challenges and how they can respond.</p> <p>Encourage the collective voice of the class not necessarily individual stories.</p> <p>Encourage the sharing of children’s knowledge, skills and abilities.</p>	<p><i>As beautiful as the trees and forests might be, are they free from danger and hazards?</i></p> <p><i>What hazards can trees face?</i></p> <p><i>We have likened our lives to those beautiful trees in the forest. Would we be right to say that, like those trees in the forest, children can also face dangers and troubles in their lives?</i></p> <p><i>Discuss the effects of these difficulties on children’s lives.</i></p> <p><i>Is it the fault of the trees? Is it the fault of the children?</i></p> <p><i>Can ask how animals respond to storms.</i></p> <p><i>These are the ways animals respond to storms, what about how children respond to storms that come into their lives?</i></p> <p><i>Are there other ways children can respond? Are there things that they can do?</i></p> <p><i>How can they protect themselves?</i></p>	<p>List the hazards for the trees.</p> <p>List the difficulties the children name.</p> <p>List the effects.</p> <p>List the responses.</p> <p>Are the storms always present?</p> <p>What do we do when storms have passed?</p>