

Transcript of interview with Stephen Finn by Mette Kyung Reacroft, Japan 2025

TA intro: What is Therapeutic Assessment and who can attend the workshop

Q: Can you give us an essential overview of what Therapeutic Assessment is and how it can be a powerful approach to facilitate change on a deeper level?

A: Yes, so in brief, Therapeutic Assessment is a short-term intervention where we use psychological tests to help clients understand their problems of living and make changes in those in a relatively short period of time. What our research shows is that in two, three, four, sometimes eight sessions you can often achieve gains with therapeutic assessment that would take a much longer time to achieve in psychotherapy. Another advantage is many clients will come for a brief structured assessment who would never come for psychotherapy because they're afraid of that. And so, we can reach a number of people who otherwise might not be able to access our services. And we work collaboratively with clients to help them understand their problems and really reach a new way of looking at them that frees them up to make steps forward. And we help them practice those steps forward during the assessment process.

Q: How are psychological tests used in Therapeutic Assessment?

A: Yes. There are really kind of three aspects to how we use tests.

One is, tests often give an opportunity to see in the assessment room a version of a problem that happens outside the office. So, let's say a client comes in complaining about attention problems. I give a psychological test that requires focused attention. I get to watch in vivo as that person struggles with their attention that I may learn certain things about it that I couldn't just from what I'm telling them. So, I might notice that their attention is worse when discussing an emotional topic as opposed to not. So, first of all, it's a way to see things in a controlled environment that can be very useful and understandable.

Second, tests provide an opportunity for discussion with clients about these things. And so, talking back and forth with the client and getting their observations about what was going on with them as they take tests and get open in the world. And tests sometimes bring up things that clients haven't talked about in years in psychotherapy. So even a simple self-report questionnaire might have an item that the client endorses true on, and if I afterwards ask about that, I find out something they haven't told their therapist they've been seeing for 12 years, and it turns out to be very important.

Then, third, this gives clients an actual experience that we can, I call it getting on the observation deck and talking about. So, clients are incredibly intelligent about their own problems. I give a test

one way and the person does poorly on it. I might change the instructions and ask them to do it again, and they might find they can do it. This is an experience for them about how they can succeed in life. And then I could recommend to their teacher or their boss or whatever a different way to do things.

And then fourth, at their best, tests are empathy magnifying glasses. When you look at a test and you understand the scores well and you have to study the test, it allows you to get in the client's shoes and understand things about the client that the client can't tell you necessarily, but which you can check out and say, I think I noticed this, is that right? And then you and the client can learn things that might otherwise never come into discussion. So, the tests are very important in assessment, in therapeutic assessment, and give us ways of achieving things that we couldn't achieve in a short period of time otherwise. My friend and mentor Constance Fisher used to say we don't learn anything through tests that we couldn't learn just by following the person around in their life all the time for a couple of years, but this is a more compact way to achieve the same understandings and to talk about them.

Q: Can you still attend the workshop if you are not so trained in psychological testing or usually not so interested in using psychological testing?

A: They certainly can attend and I'll actually show a couple of tests that one can learn pretty quickly and put to good use even if one doesn't want to go back and get a doctorate in psychological assessment. And really therapeutic assessment is kind of an attitude about approaching clients and working with clients. The tests are important, but there are some very simple tests that one can use that can deepen psychotherapy, especially when clients and you feel stuck. That like there's some place you've been going over the same material again and again and not getting deeper. This can be a way to get deeper.

