

Dialogue and Creativity: the Generative Dialogical Perspective in Therapy

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Abstract

The generative perspective in therapy understands relations and dialogue as a generative social space where participants can promote innovative resources and possibilities for themselves, their relations and circumstances, along with new social ecologies.

It focuses on the creative dimensions of human relationality. This epistemological and clinical perspective has a heuristic value that allows us to discern and work with micro dialogues – micro processes of creative, generative dialogues – in the ongoing dialogue, mindful of the opportunities for creativity and innovation they provide.

The generative perspective promotes creative processes and transformations to help clients build possible and viable futures when faced with problems, conflicts and challenges. It involves the dialogical and relational co-creation of resources and possibilities, and actions for implementation. The perspective is illustrated with a therapy process involving a three-year follow-up.

The paper includes a section where differences and similarities between dialogical perspectives are presented.

¹ Translator: Lawrence Wheeler

Keywords

generative dialogical perspective – generative micro processes, moments and processes – relational creativity and innovation – scaffolding of change – work platform – emerging learning and knowledge

Key Points

1. The article presents the generative dialogical perspective in therapy as used by professionals in different disciplines in Latin America
2. It presents and illustrates the creation and development of a generative process in a therapy involving a three-year follow-up.
3. It examines how the generative process allows therapists and clients to create resources and possibilities, build viable and sustainable futures in the face of problems, crises and conflicts. It observes the similarities and differences with other dialogic models.

Introduction

This article presents a generative perspective in therapy as a means to foster transformation through dialogical creative processes. It examines how a generative dialogue allows participants, therapists and clients to create resources and new possibilities together when faced with problems, conflicts and challenges. Self and relationships are renewed, and a viable and sustainable future emerges. Dialogue, here, is approached as a generative creative process.²

How do we foreground generative processes? By using the concept of generative dialogue to refer to the gradual creation of something new in human relationships. Key to that process are generative moments where the subtle and the emergent are discerned and expanded to create new meanings and actions through reciprocal responsiveness in dialogue. When an alternative nucleus is formed, it can be

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developed into privileged contexts for interpretation and practice. Inquiries focus on how these moments were, are, or can be generated. What types of dialogic and relational coordination foster the inception of something new emerging and its subsequent consolidation? How does that become a context that keeps new possibilities alive and allows them to effect transformation? (Fried Schnitman, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2008; Fried Schnitman y Schnitman, 2000a; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984)

The construction of futures as part of change requires acting upon current circumstances in order to explore how to access these futures. The possibilities created in generative dialogues become virtual realities which, once created, can be actualized, provided they are sustained by transformative processes. Such processes contribute to actions that lead to existential alternatives and new and diverse realities, as well as forms of living. Emerging generative processes reorient us toward an ecology of creation.

On a personal level, I began to work on transformations and creativity back in the 1970s. My interest focused on the capacity of individuals and/in relationships to spontaneously recreate and transform themselves in crises, problems and conflicts (Fried Schnitman, 1983, 2010a, 2010b). Systemic sociologist Walter F. Buckley (1968) had already described creativity as a distinctive characteristic that differentiated social systems from biological and mechanical ones. He understood that the more creative and diverse a social system was, the better its resources to offer an adaptive response to a changing world. In the seventies, Heinz von Foerster spoke of our ethical imperative to increase the number of alternatives for participants in social systems.

Reflection on the central processes of creativity, plurality and transformation allows for a range of registers³ of the therapist's participation, with both Heinz von Foerster and Morin working on second-order systemics. They question the idea of an external

³ I understand the word *register* to refer to a relational position of full attention and presence. It means to examine closely and in detail the subtle differences revealed in a person's expressions, a situation in life or a context to help us distinguish emerging moments and diversity that may lead to innovations, creativity, resources and possibilities that provide orientation on how to proceed.

observer of a 'system', considering that any observer is part of – a participant in – the system shaped by his/her participation. No system can exist without an observer or context or an ecology. It is a becoming in constant self-transformation. Therefore, I refer to my work as a perspective focused between the extant and the possible.

An ecology of creativity materialized in my work on epistemological formulations towards an ecology of creation. I include the foundational work on relationality of Gregory Bateson (1958, 1972, 1979, 1991), and other pioneers in the field, including Heinz von Foerster (2002), Ilya Prigogine (2002; Prigogine and Stengers, 1979, 1984), Edgar Morin (2002), Félix Guattari (1989, 2002), pioneers in the new paradigms (Friedman and Schnitman, 2002), developed in the second half of last century who focused on complex systems dynamics and worked on creativity, complexity, participation by an observer in the system observed, and constant systemic transformations (becoming).

In the 1990s I encountered social constructionism (Gergen, 1994, 2009; McNamee 2015a, 2015b; McNamee and Gergen, 1998; Shotter 1993, 2004) and its perspective that we, as human beings, are active participants in relationships where we create our world and ourselves, and are created by them. Since my early encounter with Ken Gergen, I have focused on the generativity of social relationships, of knowledge, meanings, and their capacity to coordinate and transform personal and social perspective. Without abandoning my connection with systemics, I have worked with systemic ideas as related to human relationships, transformations and creativity, and through socioconstructionism I have encountered newer possibilities to move forward on creative relationality. I focus my work on generative socioconstructionism, and later incorporate dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981, 1982, 1986, Morson and Emerson, 1990) which offers concepts and resources to enrich and specify the generative relationality of the perspective.

Since the mid-1990s, I have been formulating the generative dialogical perspective in therapy. Generativity, along with the construction of resources, possibilities and viable futures, was the core and this expanded into a variety of practices in my own work, as well as that of others throughout Latin America, including conflict management, peace processes, qualitative research, and community, organizational and educational

development (Fried Schnitman, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017; Fried Schnitman and Schnitman, 2000b; Fried Schnitman and Vecchi, 2001; Morales, Torres, Solís, and Ayala, 2015).

Dialogue and creativity

The generative perspective views relationships and dialogue as a generative social space in which clients and professionals distinguish and promote innovative resources, possibilities, and new ecologies. (Fried Schnitman, 1995, 1996, 2002, 2010b; Fried Schnitman y Schnitman, 2000a, 2000b; Gergen, 1994, 2009)

In this epistemological niche the generative dialogical perspective acts on the creative dimensions of human relationality. It is both *epistemological and clinical, with heuristic value*, allowing work with creative and generative micro processes of dialogue while focusing on *opportunities for creativity and innovation*.

Bakhtin's conception of dialogue entails addressing *in action* the creativity *of/in* relational micro processes. He sees dialogue as a generative relationship between individuals, and claims that *creativity emerges in the space-between people and in their reciprocal responsiveness* with the professional as an active participant. Bakhtin sees dialogic relationships as verbal-embodied, creative interpersonal communication, and suggests that in dialogue participants create new meanings. A dialogue is always relational and extends beyond language; new meanings emerge when people address and respond to each other, thus building shared intelligibility, revealed in the client's transformations and new forms of living that take shape as the process advances.

Every elocution⁴ is unique, made at a specific moment during a dialogical process that is also unique. Bakhtin understands that people express themselves and listen, actively and simultaneously, and that each expression is a response to something, and denotes intention. Listeners not only register what is said, but they also prepare their

⁴ For Bakhtin elocution refers to all expressions between participants in interpersonal communication.

responses. They relate what is said to their own web of interests, imagine how they would react to future moments in the dialogue, and evaluate how it could be understood by others in the uniqueness of each dialogue (Morson and Emerson, 1990).

In dialogue people express themselves not only in what is said, but also in their tone of voice, their gestures, the particular way in which something is formulated (as a question, hypothesis, invitation, affirmation, negation, etc.), their emotions and the intangibility of the relational space. These 'voices' may be convergent or divergent, implicit or explicit.

For Bakhtin a dialogue is multidimensional and complex; it is *a process, always incomplete, a becoming*. It contains multiple voices and relationships, and social spaces of individual, relational, contextual, cultural and social meanings. Each dialogue features echoes of the past and of possible futures. There may be internal tension between multiple dialogues with centripetal or centrifugal forces, resulting in different perspectives, registers or approaches, generating tension or creativity through links.

Bakhtin says that engaging in dialogue may refer to the 'other' in a relationship, but also to another person, to aspects and versions of oneself or of ideal or virtual others, to cultural, social and religious perspectives, or a project, process, idea, life experiences. The result is a diversity of dialogues.

Creativity is always present in a dialogue, in which participants produce something new and unique. It also exists in new resonances of relationships and experiences from the past resignified in the present, or of a possible future. New links may be created between networks of dialogues, increasing creativity and providing new meanings and possibilities.

With reference to Bakhtin, we understand dialogical relations as a polyphonic process of embodied, responsive, active, attentive, relational expression-comprehension, in multiple registers⁵. Participants build their mutual relationship and together create

⁵ The generative perspective focuses on registering resources so subtle that they verge on the imperceptible. It heeds emerging events that enable participants to discern novel situations and to construct innovative moments and possibilities with generative potential for themselves, their relationships, and their circumstances, and helps them find the resources to

meanings that enable shared intelligibility. This reciprocal responsiveness makes participants co-authors of the elocutions, the dialogue itself and its development.

Micro dialogues or micro dialogical processes

Registering relational micro processes and the opportunities they provide in the dialogue allows professionals and clients to work on creating innovations, identifying resources and possibilities related to the problems that bring them to consultation. Professionals and clients actively and creatively work together, *in* and *from* the dialogue in which creation occurs, and ‘something new’ is born. Expansion of these generative micro processes will prompt broader innovations or transformations in generative processes.

In the generative perspective the professional is *always* present and attentive, and his/her discernment, responsiveness and creativity are part of the dialogue. He/she participates ethically, according to the client’s initial request and to any that may emerge during the treatment, providing the framework for the process. He/she also participates aesthetically, depending on the client’s idiosyncrasies, focusing on what is (and even what is not) verbally expressed, and on the expectations, hopes and requests of the client. This is not a strategic practice or relationship but generative dialogue.

Active exchanges between the professional and the client make it possible to build and acknowledge the generative scaffolding with which dialogue and a transformation process are shaped. Generative micro processes in the relationship allow for recognition and an understanding of how the client moves from the deficit and

change those relationships and circumstances. The generative focus fosters keener register of the possibilities that might enable participants to distinguish those possibilities, and to find options and make choices. At stake is the ability of persons in dialogue to discern and expand their register beyond the problem that initially sparked the consultation. In so doing, they are able to address as well other aspects of themselves and their relationships, other resources and possibilities. As we shall see shortly, including other options ushers into generative processes conducive to transformations and to the construction of viable and sustainable futures. (Fried Schnitman, 2021)

problems towards emerging creative processes. This favours the creation of resources, possibilities and transformations of themselves and of their lives.

In short, the generative perspective focuses on reciprocal responsiveness, joint innovation, the creation of alternatives in the dialogical confluences in time, and also on the creation of shared intelligibility.

A generative process moves from registration of the subtle and the emerging towards the creation of new forms of life. Creativity thus expands to all spheres and dimensions of human life (Guattari, 1989, 2002).

The full presence and attention the professional attaches to the initiatives of the clients, as well as their answers and validation of the initiatives offered by the professional, are essential ingredients in any generative process (Fried Schnitman, 2021; McNamee, 2015a, 2015b). They occur in the *relational space* between professionals and clients. The professional is attentive to the creative and generative moments in the relationship that open possibilities for alternatives. What is new will emerge in the dialogue and in the confluences over time, giving rise to new words, new meanings that enrich the dialogue and shared intelligibility, and new forms of life that clients can recognize as new knowledges emerge.

Scaffolding of a generative process

The creation of a generative process is marked by a diversity of creative moments which are consolidated, as the relationship is built, as resources and possibilities in the dialogue between the participants.

The process is constructed step by step on the creativity of the dialogue. Each generative step operates as a temporary support which organizes and advances the process by creating new possibilities and novel dialogues leading to transformations in a client's life.

Generative moments, cycles and matrices: working with generativity

Those special moments when the professional first meets the client – interactive moments – are ones of reciprocal recognition and openness. It is here that the relationship, as well as the generativity, begins to take shape.

When a client states the reasons that bring them to consultation, they often provide a one-dimensional and saturated version of their problems: they introduce what we call *problematic node/s*, which the professional listens to and acknowledges. At the same time, the professional carefully maintains a multiple register, recognizing what is not said but is expressed by the client in the consultation, as well as their implicit and explicit expectations, aspirations, wishes and hopes. As Bateson (1972, 1979) proposed, very early, our capacity for creating – for listening or having perspectives – is expanded. From this beginning that Bateson offered, we now suggest that our capacity for creating is multiple. When recognizing what is not said, other authors, like Michael White, referred to the idea of the absent but implicit story and the task of ‘double listening’ (White, 2000, p.35-58).

Professionals and clients work on these problematic nodes and, as the process moves forward, the professional remains attentive to other aspects in the client’s life that could drive or create alternatives by expanding the initial perspective.

It is important to discern opportunities in the dialogue, which may be both problematic as well as potentially innovative: emerging, creative and generative moments, which could start and support the generative processes. The *emerging moments*, variations or minor events that occur in the dialogue, if recognized and validated by both professionals and clients, become creative moments that can promote innovations and possibilities. If possibilities emerge and are validated by the clients they become generative moments with the potential for innovation. When they move forward and expand, they become nodes of possibilities and generative processes, and offer the chance to draw novel paths, and to create resources and new perspectives.

They move away from the initial problematic node, exploring instances of dialogue that provide the chance to distinguish other resources and alternatives not previously considered. This allows people to construct broader, and perhaps new perspectives about themselves, about others, their circumstances, relationships and possibilities. If this occurs in the process, the connection becomes richer and takes the form of a *network with new differentiated possibilities* (nodes). Over time, these possibilities become intertwined and synthesized, increasing the productivity and creativity of the process. Once the process is in motion, the transformation expands and gains a

dynamic of its own. In the dialogical confluences, both clients and professional build meanings, a *shared and hitherto unknown intelligibility*. These *meanings and forms of understanding allow the process to be moved on*, and facilitating nodes of resources, new meanings and enabling networks are created.

The professional should always recognize and incorporate the initiatives of the clients, which become new generative resources. He/she should be attentive to their answers, as well as to their recovery of experiences, which could be related to other moments of the therapeutic process, or to their lives. By incorporating these generative moments into the dialogue and into the lives of the clients as articulators of new perspectives and actions, they prompt transformations and change. They can expand, connect with other nodes and become *networks of enabling nodes which act synergically; these resources and possibilities can also expand to other areas of the client's life and initiate generative cycles*, which produce further transformations, possibilities and learnings. Imagining a future also brings possibilities into the present. As we shall see in the example, in the generative perspective, innovations can also be initiated by the professional in response to clients' comments, and should always be responsively validated by the clients' responses. The professional is always attentive to responsivity in dialogue.

Opportunities for innovation also emerge in the recovery, recycling or expansion of resources that are either present in the life of the client or recovered from the past.

When the enabling nodes and networks as well as the generative cycles expand to different areas of the client's life, and promote novel and productive meanings, they may develop what we call a *generative matrix*. This is a web of meanings of new resources and possibilities which act synergically, generating or promoting perspectives, feelings, values, narrations and novel actions related to the register that people have of themselves, their resources and their circumstances. It allows significant transformations and promotes more productive futures and new ways of life, as illustrated in the example.

The generative process in action: dialogue, micro dialogues, network of dialogues and creative syntheses

The following example reveals processes in the dialogue that involve active participation by the clients and the professional. We see how creative links promote the construction of resources, possibilities and futures, while recognizing new feelings and an understanding of life by the clients, and a joint search for new and more viable futures. Professionals and clients form a team that creates dialogues through which they build a present and a future and recover a renewed version of the past. The example also illustrates creative moments in the dialogue: generative moments (micro dialogues), how a generative process emerges, a network of dialogues and the emergence of resources and possibilities, transformations of self, identities, relationships and realities, and a project of life that is activated as the therapy progresses. We see an ecology of creation in action.

Cristina Ruffino,⁶ Ph.D. in Psychology, senior family therapist, presents this consultation at the Diploma Course in Perspective and Generative Professional Practice to explore generative processes.

Referred by her psychologist, Daniela (D) requests a consultation for herself and her family, who regularly contact the professional to complain about D. The psychologist suggests that D and her family should see a family therapist. D is 39 years old, has been in treatment since she was 26, and is also medicated under psychiatric supervision. D continues her individual therapy and medication while these family sessions take place.

In the interview, D's family, whose members have a joint business, begin by sharing their problems, mentioning frequent arguments, accusations and mounting animosity towards D. Her brother describes her as mentally unbalanced and impulsive. He says he is present at the interview on the request of his parents but holds no hope that their relationship will change. The father wants to avoid arguments and sees D as an impetuous person who is always making unnecessary comments. The mother

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complains of the general animosity and claims that her son is too inflexible and her daughter too emotional. D says her brother misinterprets everything she says, that they argue constantly and no longer speak to each other. She adds that her father doesn't understand her. Sometimes she feels she is unable to manage alone and is increasingly being ignored. She feels increasingly lonely and wishes she were dead. She speaks of different psychiatric diagnoses she has received (borderline, bipolar, and now depression). D had attempted suicide several times. Two weeks earlier she had planned to jump from the window of the family business. After writing her suicide note, she entered the building one Sunday, but was unable to get into the apartment because the lock had been changed the previous Friday. We shall take some extracts which illustrate innovative micro dialogues, a web of dialogues and emerging processes in a generative process. (At different moments of the process we can identify a diversity of dialogues and voices emerging from different personal, family, social, religious, cultural, business, professional contexts related to present, past and future moments).

The account of the unsuccessful suicide attempt is followed by a sequence in which generative micro processes can be observed:

Therapist (T): D, how do you account for the fact that such a carefully planned suicide attempt failed? [*T sustains the dialogue, is responsive to D.*]

D: God saved me [*Responsive, a link and a new meaning "appear" within a protective relationship with God. An emerging moment that will become generative.*]

T: (to the family) Do you also think God saved her?

They agree [*The family is responsive and convergent.*]

T: D, what does God know about you to convince him you had to carry on living? [*T begins to generatively explore an alternative perspective D has of herself*]

D: I don't know.

T: (To the family, who have religious beliefs): Before we continue discussing your problems, could you tell me what God knows about D that she doesn't know, and that made Him decide she had to carry on living?

[Respectfully - with generative questions – she moves from the problems to possibilities, exploring other descriptions that might help D and her family broaden their perception of her and family relations. T moves forward to generativity.]

Each family member responds to the invitation and mentions various positive resources and contributions D has made to the family or the company. With their reflections and contributions, they elaborate a novel and *emerging description* of D and of family relations. The new description is diverse and considers different contributions by D to the family that show her and the family as having possibilities beyond the mutual accusations and quarrels. *[There are confluences in the family dialogue, a web of dialogues and an emerging personal and relational intelligibility.]*

T: (to D): Do you agree? *[T explores whether D recognizes herself in the new appreciative description.]*

D: Yes, but I had no idea my family knew. *[Confluences of meaning that favour shared intelligibility. We see in action the creation of a new narrative of identity for D and of relations within the family.]*

We see how generative scaffolding is constructed in the dialogue. With active participation, the clients and the professional build new meanings that are consolidated in the new narrative of identity for D and the family.

During the next two sessions the family continues to speak. In the fourth session, they mention a serious argument over commercial decisions. D proposes making changes in the company, but her father and brother have no wish to change anything in their successful company (voices in a conflict which escalates violently and that neither D nor the family can resolve; they have irreconcilable corporate views which clash with other family, personal and gender perspectives). A violent discussion erupts, the brother again refers to the serious accusations he mentioned earlier. When the therapist asks him how he thinks D feels when she hears those accusations, he says he doesn't care, that she should die and stop being a nuisance for the family. D "explodes" and says she refuses to be accused again and will commit suicide, but this time it won't fail. *[The problematic node is also an active construction of their*

relationship. We see how, after a generative process, unproductive relationships are reiterated. They maintain and intensify the problem and the official story, which are reinstated in the dialogical and relational dynamics. They are not generative; Gergen calls them de-generative relationships.]

The tone and formulations of a generative therapist are neither instructive nor prescriptive; they are always reflective. It is important to note that generative questions cannot be understood outside the flow of the conversation; i.e., they are not instrumental but are designed to expand or enrich the dialogue. (Fried Schnitman, 2008)

The therapist now suggests individual interviews with D, in a productive but interrupted generative process. D accepts. In these interviews, D and T focus on the life of D, and we can distinguish micro processes of creation of resources and innovative possibilities for D – generative moments and processes – and a network of dialogues which positively move generativity forward in the life of D.

First session

T returns to previous events to explore what actually made D respond so explosively to her brother's accusation, and then threaten to commit suicide.

D: My brother wants to get rid of me, and my father is on his side.

T: So what makes you so obedient towards your brother? (D doesn't understand)
[This is an initiative by T in answer to events and to D's comments.]

T: How could you not continue to act as the others describe, and expect you to act? Your brother said you were unbalanced, crazy, and you reacted just as he described you. How come you lost sight of the clever, balanced person I know you to be? *[T invites D to recover her resources and possibilities, listen to herself and see herself in her diversity as she recovers experiences from therapy.]*

D: I always did what my father wanted. I studied Business Administration, since he wanted to ensure I'd fit in in the family business, and not follow an art-related professional career, as I wanted *[Generative moment. D answers reflexively. Her expression and emotion also reveal internal dialogues not put into words,*

and a shared intelligibility develops, connecting emotions, reflections, experiences. These dialogical expressions cut through the dialogue and are as responsive as those verbally expressed. They are progressively put into words]

D tells T of her life at university, her joy at living in a cosmopolitan city, and her artistic life, interests and networks.

T: Now you see the difference and can choose what you want, what would you choose? *[Active participation by T, who responds by inviting her to review her decisions and to recognize herself, investigate and expand her possibilities in search of personal, more satisfying options. She is active in the dialogue, not offering a diagnosis but inviting her to investigate micro processes and a network of dialogues in search of a possibility.]*

D: It doesn't matter. It's too late. *[This expression appears to summarize a series of dialogues D has with herself. They contain a register of her circumstances and doubts, in which she seems to respond to despair, but also to possibility.]*

T: Maybe now you can reconnect with your desires and explore your possibilities in your networks. *[T answers –as if they'd already discussed it– with creative initiatives in the dialogue. She associates dialogues from different contexts and moments displaying creativity in the construction of her resources, possibilities and the paths D's life is taking. T's active participation appears in micro dialogues, validated by D's answers and initiatives. T registers what has been expressed, but not verbalized.]*

Following session

D: With a friend from university an opportunity arose in relation to art which interests me. I decide to explore. *[D begins by taking up what was said in the previous session and expresses original initiatives with interest and hope].*

[D initiates reflexive and generative dialogues with herself, her interests, life and networks, and speaks of renewed resources. We observe generative and transformative processes shared with the therapist and a transformative investigation of resources and possibilities towards a viable future. We can see the dialogue flowing creatively

and the emergence of new openings for her life. We also see an emerging intelligibility, with micro processes of creation of innovations –resources and possibilities– in the dialogue, the generativity of the web of present, past and future dialogues in which D and T work together, prompting changes and a new life for D. D’s transformations are evident.]

During the interviews D decides to return to the city where she studied because it offers better opportunities as well as the chance to become part of an artistic venture. She wants to preserve her ties with her family and her share in the business, without working there. She seeks legal advice and acts accordingly. She works with T on how, in subsequent meetings, to present her family with her project and the decisions she has made, with a renewed view of herself and her life: a transformation without resignation.

In the last three sessions D shares with her family the decisions she has made about her life and her future, without criticism or accusations. They explore different ways of understanding work. She is calm and sure of her decision and wishes to keep the support of her family and her stake in the family business.

Follow-ups: transformations in D and her life

In a follow-up session months later, D is very well. She is living alone, has launched her business venture and is satisfied with her decision. In a second follow-up, D reports she is living an independent, productive life and has decided to study museum curatorship in Europe and is enjoying life. She wonders why she insisted on participating in the family business, where she would be unable to offer the best of herself, i.e., her creativity, which was at the root of all the quarrels and differences regarding future plans for the company that would exclude her, and where she would be unable to find a suitable place. In another follow-up session three years later, D is still very well, and tells T ‘you wouldn’t know me’. She’s curating an exhibition in a European museum and is very happy. She’s in a loving relationship, doesn’t need medication, and only takes a few drops of CBD, prescribed by her clinician, before going to sleep, and does not require psychiatric treatment.

[We emphasize that in this process T did not seek to make a diagnosis, or identify a symptom or pathology, but did consider them in the voices present in the dialogue e.g., professional diagnosis, psychiatric medication and treatment, comments by D and the family. D undergoes a transformation in herself, her relationships and her life. The transformative investigation she realized with T, the progressive changes she makes in her life, her reflections on them and her life are clear to see. We witness in action the creation of each instance of a new generative matrix of meanings in this process of transformation; a novel organizer that marks out the path of new forms of life for D in the last three years. The whole process occurred within the dialogue, with the active inclusion and participation of T. We stress that the pragmatic dimension, the effective transformations in the way of life are a central ingredient of the generative perspective, just like the possibility of reflecting on her personal and relational transformations and those in her life.]

The creation of a generative process: dialogical relationship, work platform, discernment and creativity

Dialogical relationship

The first exchanges between professionals and clients focus on the *creation of a dialogical relationship* to lay the bases for joint work. To speak of such a relationship implies entering a shared tradition in which clients and professionals reciprocally recognize each other as interlocutors *in an inclusive, participative and respectful relationship with creative involvement*. Joint intelligibility emerges and a sense of belonging is created.

Recognizing oneself as a participant in the dialogue is a generative moment in itself. It encourages clients to feel they are being heard, acknowledged. Clients incorporate an emerging perspective of themselves, which is not merely problematic or lacking but in which there is a vision of appreciation, trust and hope.

Platform of work and generative dialogue

As the confluence and intelligibility between clients and professionals emerge and develop, a sense of direction in the process towards the progressive construction of what we call *platform of work* is built, i.e., a *process of shared responsiveness, in which a mastery of dialogue becomes evident. As their dialogues progress, the participants start to create this shared sense of direction for the process by creating and linking problems with new resources and possibilities. Shared purposes and a project for therapy thus develop.* That sense of direction and belonging will be expressed as specific transformations in the clients, their relationships and circumstances, and will prompt new possibilities to facilitate new ways of life. Direction is built in reciprocal responsiveness in the dialogue, and the process emerges from the evolution of the process itself. The transformations that take place are validated by the clients and orient the process. They are not the result of the application of a model or strategy provided by the professional but emerge from the encounter between professionals and clients in the creativity of the dialogue and are incorporated as new possibilities, perspectives and ways of life by the clients. The direction of the process can be sustained, diversified, expanded, modified in the dialogue as long as it is relevant to the needs and expectations of the clients.

In the example, we observe the dialogical scaffolding of this creative and generative process as it materializes step by step in the transformations. It is important to stress that the generative process occurs within the dialogue, and the direction of the dialogue is constantly being created in the course of the dialogue.

As the process moves forward, new generative moments expand the transformation possibilities of the clients in the therapeutic process that, in turn, guide them towards a viable future. The process is created by the dialogue.

When clients recognize their transformations in the generative process, they create a novel version of themselves, their relationships and circumstances. As it moves forward, this intelligibility promotes an effective redesign of their way of life. A different emotionality emerges about themselves, their relationships and circumstances. Reflection on these transformations is expressed in clients' new versions of their circumstances, learnings and emerging knowledge of themselves,

their relationships, resources and possibilities, and the creation of new personal and social worlds. These transformative, pragmatic and reflective dimensions are an integral part of the whole process.

In the course of a generative process clients start to incorporate themes, possibilities and novel ways of participating, understanding and narrating, which shape reorganizations or innovations in themselves, their relationships and circumstances. The emerging transformations are intertwined as new nodes of resources and possibilities, which mark alternative paths that can transform the reasons that initially led to the consultation. The professional can introduce or initiate reflections and comments related to the themes being discussed. It is the dialogical nature and the replies of the clients that will validate them as relevant. The therapist takes part in the dialogue *with* the clients, but not *about* the clients.

In acknowledging and incorporating transformations, clients reflect upon them and facilitate a new generative, local learning process about their resources, possibilities and achievements. We can see how dialogue in therapy and self and life intertwine in a transformative process until the process becomes independent of the therapy and moves into life.

Professionals and clients

As we have seen, dialogue is constructed in dialogic actions, and in the fabric of experiences and networks expressed. The process is built in the process of being in the dialogue.

Each generative process is unique and makes way for a present and prospective investigation of the client's resources and possibilities in relation to the problems that bring them to therapy. It is a joint generative investigation between professionals and clients which builds presents and futures (Fried Schnitman, 2000a, 2020).

Professionals and clients are active agents in the joint generation of meanings and innovative possibilities that emerge during the dialogue. For the professional, this position means including his/her active participation in the relational field, developing a practice based on creativity, generative research and collaboration. It also involves

maintaining a pragmatic view focused on the new actions displayed by the clients, and the possibilities these offer. In this reflective pragmatic perspective, the professionals acknowledge not only the emerging and generative moments, and the creation of facilitating and transformative nodes, but also the actions shaping the process itself and the effective transformations in the ways of life, of the clients and those of his/her own practice.

Professionals and clients work as *members of a creative and generative team*, who build the process and learn reflectively from their own interactions and results. *It is an emerging learning. They form a work space* and explore possibilities and *investigate* alternatives and the new resources they can bring.

If necessary, other significant people or other professionals may be included in the process. They will work together as a *community* to develop and create possibilities and liaisons to build the appropriate new social ecologies in which they will be included.

Complexity of the dialogue: the proposal in the generative dialogical perspective and in other dialogical approaches

Different approaches in therapy are thought of as dialogical. Each one favours different dialogical and relational micro processes, with various projects, aims and contexts. This may be confusing for a professional who feels he/she has to choose one or the other.

We suggest to all readers that direction in the dialogue will emerge by attending to the specific needs and circumstances the clients bring to therapy and the ones they are working on in the process⁷. The professional's register and reflexivity on his/her own

⁷ Generative dialogues help us hone our ability to detect differences between events and circumstances that ensue very close to one another, almost at the same time, and that could go unnoticed if those who experience them are not fully attentive and present. That enhanced perception increases our ability for sustained engagement with richer perspectives and dialogues, thus enabling us to create, to innovate and expand, existing resources. At stake is registering subtle differences and –as generative dialogue proposes– heightening our ability to recognize the different, the novel, the emerging, that which is taking place in the present. This is what enables people to find alternatives to transform themselves, their circumstances, and their relationships, to engage in better dialogues with themselves and with others, to increase awareness and wisdom, and to lead fuller and more mindful lives in the groups of which they form part. (Fried Schnitman, 2021)

work, and on the reciprocal responsivity with the client, the client's answers, and the client's emerging and original contributions, will guide him/her in the process. As in all dialogic work the professional will be very attentive to the client in multiple registers.

With all his/her professional and personal experience, the generative professional is an active participant, with full attention and presence, who is aware of the singular context and relationship. However, their participation in these unique circumstances will be guided by reciprocal responsiveness in the dialogue, with total respect and acknowledgement for the client, whose experiences of themselves, their lives and their current circumstances the professional takes into account. This register enables professionals and clients to create, innovate and expand existing and emergent resources, and by so doing register subtle differences. It heightens our ability to discern what is different, novel and emerging. This is what opens possibilities for people to find alternatives to transform themselves, their circumstances and their relationships to thus increase awareness and wisdom, and to lead fuller and more mindful lives.

There are no hegemonic 'dialogical' perspectives or procedures, no unique dialogical perspective, and each one responds to the dimensions that organize the dialogue. However, there are marked differences between them depending on the context, perspective and micro processes highlighted by the dialogical perspective. One involves how the participation of the professional in the dialogue is understood; another is which micro processes of the dialogue are of interest to the professional to work on; and finally, an understanding of the dialogue as relationship and action.

In other approaches – such as *open dialogue* (as proposed by Jakko Seikkula), or *collaborative dialogue* (as proposed by Harlene Anderson) – the professional is not seen as an active participant in the dialogue and the relationship in the same way. For Seikkula and Anderson the focus is placed on the otherness of the client, and on a relationship in which the therapist is an attentive listener, accompanying the client and responding in a detailed, reflective exploration. What stands out is the flow of the

conversation. The stance of the therapist is 'reserved', i.e., listening, and giving space. Both Harlene Anderson and Jaakko Seikkula would see this stance as a form of active participation. In both perspectives the dialogue and the relationship will centre on similar micro processes but in different circumstances. The therapist works on these approaches by focusing on the client's otherness in the flow of dialogue, not solely on the client; in the generative approach the therapist works with the client in the flow of dialogue and also on the generative micro processes – emergent events – as arising from a creative relationship in action. Understanding the concept of respect which is shared by the three perspectives is important because there are differences. In one instance (Seikkula and Anderson) the focus depends on the present response to the client; while in the generative perspective, it depends not only on the present response to the client, but also on the transformations of the client's relationship to his/her original request, the expectations and hopes expressed, the work platform developed and also the client's transformations experienced through the generative process. There is an ethical perspective in relation to the client's request and the context and steps of the generative process.

With reference to dialogue as proposed by Jaakko Seikkula (Seikkula and Arnkil, 2019), open dialogue is an approach that was developed in a context of acute and severe crises, such as psychosis (Olson, 2015; Seikkula, Alakare and Aaltonen, 2001; Seikkula and Olson, 2003). It is a network approach. It incorporates participants and related people, those from the client's social network and those professionals that will be involved in the treatment the social network of the professionals (Seikkula and Arnkil, 2007). Seikkula's work on severe crises is a very important contribution in that field. He believes that dialogue should recognize and respect otherness, and stresses the importance of listening carefully, accepting the other and responding to what is said so as to generate dialogical space and a "relational atmosphere" that allows the client to put the psychotic crisis experienced into words. It produces a common language between clients and professionals. The micro processes of dialogue centre around the client's resources to put their lived experiences into words, and also the appropriate relational atmosphere that allows this to happen; in which rhythm, pauses, silences, listening and expression are important provided they favour the relational

atmosphere. Seikkula believes that establishing a person-to-person dialogical relationship with absolute respect for otherness is the central ingredient of open dialogue. This relational atmosphere, the creation of shared words and recognition, will be the focus of the relational micro processes. It will not register generative micro processes, which might eventually arise in the conversation between professionals in the network, who will share their bodily reactions and reflections, enriching the dialogue and incorporating new words.

The perspective and practice of anticipatory dialogues designed by Tom Erik Arnkil (Seikkula and Arnkil, 2019), a close collaborator and co-author of Seikkula, is a response to the context and the need to coordinate teams and ecologies for the treatment of patients suffering from severe crises. Coordination within and between teams and the non-replication of procedures is essential. The generative perspective defines these processes as the *creation of new social ecologies* in complex situations. Bonds should be created to link circumstances, professionals, organizations and/or different kinds of institutions, both for coordination and the creation of the necessary conditions.

Harlene Anderson (1997, 2020; Anderson and Gehart, 2007) suggests that the professional in the collaborative approach becomes a conversational partner⁸ of the clients, working *with* them in collaborative conversations from a position of not knowing. 'Not knowing' is a concept elaborated by Harold Goolishian and Harlene Anderson (2002) that includes questioning the professional's *privileged expert knowledge* and highlighting the client's knowledge as pre-eminent.

Harlene Anderson works on the relationship-conversation pairing, which go hand in hand with each other. As the focus of her work she incorporates the central concept of *witness*, as coined by John Shotter (2004), i.e., working with the client, not on the client.

In meeting a client, she carefully creates the conditions for conversation that will allow him/her to feel valued, and to feel that his/her contributions and opinions are

⁸A conversational partner is a person associated with another, or others, for a certain purpose. Is this the same as 'a full participant in the conversation'?

important. She becomes involved in a curious way with comments and reflections. Attitude and tone are of interest in the joint work. She uses a metaphor she has taken from Derrida with the same relational design: host and guest. In the conversation she alternates with the client as they listen and express themselves.

The author prioritizes listening, observing, registering and responding reflectively in a non-hierarchical professional setting. Emphasis on careful listening and registration makes people feel they are being heard, it prompts them to speak and respond, and models a process of listening to the other conveying that we understand. Although Harlene Anderson does not propose this, one could speculate that there could be a loop and that people transfer this design of dialogue to themselves, their inner dialogues and their circumstances, which allows them to examine themselves, their circumstances and meanings from different angles and perspectives (a second-order process). Harlene Anderson emphasizes narrative transformations and the interpretations that take place in the collaborative conversation, and stresses that this stance invites a shared questioning and the emergence of generativity. Here, generativity would be an epiphenomenon of the collaborative process and the narrative transformations in the dialogue.

The **generative dialogical** perspective I present favours the register of the flow of the dialogue and of those creative moments in relationships and dialogue, and recognizes generative processes in both. It is very attentive to increased resources, possibilities and transformations. It considers that the narrative is not originally the centre of the process, but accompanies transformations in the generative dialogue. The therapist is not a partner⁹ in the conversation with the client, but an active relational participant who is involved in the reciprocal responsiveness of the dialogue. In an interesting observation, Lynn Hoffman (2007) stated that the best result of an interview is that people should feel that the conversation was the author of what was said. This is what happens in a generative dialogue: in their responsiveness in the conversation both

⁹The distinction between 'partner in conversation' and 'active relational participant in dialogue' requires attention.

professional and clients are the authors of what is said and generated: there is relational creativity.

Therapists and clients are involved in a particular generative dialogic relationship that begun at a moment and in a specific context by a client; the relationship, the dialogue and their convergences in the dialogue are those that will build the relationship between the therapist and the client.

The therapist participates with his/her experiences and knowledge, the result of both professional training, and his/her practice is included in this relationship. The client participates in a similar fashion. However, to work on a novel situation, the professional needs to learn and investigate with the client what brings them to therapy and aspects of their life, as well as the emerging resources and transformation that take place in the process. Their reciprocal responsivity in the dialogue and the client's responses will guide the process. They research and create in dialogue. This is the frame or the context of dialogue. Emerging perspectives, feelings and actions, knowledge and learnings about self, relationships and circumstances allow the client to recover resources and possibilities and transform their life.

In their work, professionals and clients need to create and generate resources and possibilities for the client, recover hopes and desires, as well as the client's experiences and resources beyond the problem that brings them to therapy. The professional and the client generate alternatives and knowledge about the situation being shared. They establish an embedded/embodied dialogue in a specific space-time context. They relate, investigate, build and learn together to work *on* and *with* dialogues, develop the client's creative potential, acknowledge and participate in novel generative moments, distinguish possibilities and accompany the client's transformation process. The dialogue prompts clients to consider those alternatives and build possible and achievable futures, transforming themselves, their relations, circumstances and ways of life.

They learn to work on and with that process, to recognize and participate in the purpose and projects that emerged and are generated in the conversation that give the process a direction, avoiding unproductive dichotomies between strategy and dialogue.

When other authors, e.g., Seikkula, Anderson, are critical of strategy, they allude to expert knowledge and a linear strategy, in a modernist epistemology, i.e., by 'acting on' instead of 'acting with' the client.

In paying attention to the creativity of the dialogue, we can identify directions, processes and emerging local wisdoms created jointly in dialogue and in confluences over time, without dismissing the richness and experience of the professional at the service of the client.

Edgar Morin (2002) made complex reformulations of the notion of system as something that the participants create. He characterizes the notion of complex strategy as 'being at the helm in changing and uncertain situations.' Perhaps we could mention the art that therapists and clients employ in leading the therapy together with clients steering their own lives in uncertain and changing situations for which the therapist's creative participation is helpful and productive. The process of working together creates the scaffolding for the generative process, its objectives, purposes and projects. *It is not external to it. These generative dimensions of dialogue are perhaps considered and explored less by other approaches.*

From a pragmatic reflective position, in the generative dialogical perspective the participants dialogue helps the client recognize or recover original resources and abilities, create emerging versions of themselves, and narrate themselves in unprecedented ways. The client also incorporates learnings and know-how, and thinks differently about their circumstances, transforming their lives in a reflective process of generative valuation. That is a valuation geared to recognizing what is new.

As mentioned above, the generative dialogical perspective seeks to emphasize the creative potential of dialogue, which makes it possible to sustain innovative relationships in facing challenges, problems and crises in different contexts.

Creativity and generativity of the dialogue are part of our lives. They are present in all personal, familiar and cultural relations, and in the relationships between networks of dialogues in which we are part.

Our ontology is dialogical, relational and multiple, and our capacity to navigate this dialogicity offers multiple resources for creation and innovation. We must – or at least

need to – recognize the multiplicity of possible intersections and the creative resources generated. This approach works on the complexity and richness of dialogue – as a relationship – as a joint creation, but also on the singularity and ethical, aesthetic and contextual relevance of each consultation.

When a professional works dialogically he/she can resort to the multiplicity of his/her client's experiences while observing the singularity of the ongoing process. The dichotomy between expert knowledge and generative local knowledge in action is diluted. Both professional and client remain open to the generativity of the dialogue and to existing and emerging learnings and knowledge.

Being in dialogue inspires all these various perspectives. Transversality between them is the result of being in a relationship marked by respect, attentive register and careful listening, and reception of what is expressed by the clients, their inclusion and recognition in the process and, above all, their participation. This is along with the importance of reciprocal responsivity of and in the dialogue.

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