

**Transforming Encounters and Interactions:
A Dialogical Inquiry into the Influence of Collaborative Therapy
In the Lives of its Practitioners:
*Captivating Moments in our Shared Inquiry***

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Project Overview

Fourteen collaborative therapy practitioners from six countries come together in June 2005 to begin a *shared inquiry* into *practitioner* experience of practice as generative and transforming. This project extends my longtime interest in reciprocity and generative mutual influence in human service work—an interest shared and ‘stoked’ by the international collaborative practice community. Harlene Anderson (2003b) describes collaborative practice as transforming for *both* client and practitioner, and her words form one of the springboards in this project:

The therapist is not an expert agent of change; that is, a therapist does not change another person. Rather, the therapist’s expertise is in creating a space and facilitating a process for dialogical conversations and collaborative relationships. When involved in this kind of process, both client and therapist are shaped and reshaped—transformed—as they work together (2003b, p.133).

Project central question.

The following question is central within the project; practitioners respond to it using both spoken conversation and journal writing: ***How could you describe your practice as generative and transforming for yourself?***

Significant events and dates.

Three interactive events are critical in shaping this inquiry:

- Face-to-face dialogue in Playa Del Carmen, International Summer Institute, 2005 (The Playa Dialogue)
- Journalling in response to the project’s central question, July through August, 2005
- Primary author uses writing to respond into the journalling of colleagues, “defending” the study at the University of Tilburg, the Netherlands, November, 2008.

The Playa Dialogue

The project’s inaugural conversation (The Playa Dialogue) begins with our face-to-face meeting as a collective of collaborative practitioners, early one Tuesday evening

at the International Summer Institute in Playa del Carmen. Coming together from Australia, Sweden, Norway, Mexico, the Canadian Prairies, and the eastern, western, and southern coasts of the USA, our differing accents and language preferences present us with an invigorating communication challenge. We lean forward into the conversation, trying to gain a felt sense of each others' contributions beyond word recognition. We agree to keep our identities confidential throughout this project.

As we struggle to begin, one of our Mexican practitioners, Abelinda, offers a metaphor and a story, a partial description of her experience of practice as liberating and joyous. With her contribution, reference to the 'not-knowing' stance of the collaborative practitioner begins in our project. A fellow participant, Geovonna, translates Abelinda's words during our Playa Dialogue:

"I think it will be easier to describe what my collaborative approach is--(*pauses*) I can do this contrasting what I *used* to do when I finished my studies at the university. At first I thought I had to plan every session and that I had to know what I would do with each person... but most important I felt I had to have an answer to the questions and the doubts the other person had. When I left the university, I could have described myself as a *Pepila therapist*."

A *Pepila* therapist? This is new to us—perhaps even Abelinda has never spoken these words before. Sharing Abelinda's cultural roots, Geovonna offers some helpful background information:

"This familiar *Pepila* person was a character in Mexican history within the war for independence. In order to cross the field where they were having the war, he tied himself a big stone on his shoulders and back in order to cross the field without being hurt."

Abelinda continues,

"I was a *Pepila* therapist, because I was carrying this stone. And that stone was everything I had to know in order to be a good therapist. Knowing postmodern ideas and a different way of being a therapist has allowed me to take that stone away from my back so I can feel light, free. And I can be myself—with my style—with my comfortable ways of being in therapy... The therapy space is a space where we can speak about our lives. Each client that I encounter, each new client, is an opportunity to learn new things about life. Each conversation is an opportunity to look at something in a different way than we did before."

As I involve myself with Abelinda's voice once again, I am drawn to the words, "each" and "new." I am struck by her emphasis on particularity and novelty: "each client that I

encounter,” “each new client,” “learn new things about life,” and “look at something in a different way than we did before.” Abelinda reminds us that the collaborative therapist is primarily oriented to the wisdom and understanding generated ‘for the first time’ in each therapy conversation, with each client. Rather than orienting to the abundance of abstract, general, knowledge circulating within the psychotherapy profession, Abelinda listens with her whole being to the very particular, local, practical understandings generated in each interactive moment with her clients.

Olaf, from Sweden responds to the metaphor Abelinda offers. He speaks of gaining “hope and freedom” in his work as he adopts a ‘not-knowing’ approach. Like Abelinda, he celebrates the freedom that comes from declining the role of knowledge expert. Speaking of his way of learning *together* with his clients, Olaf says,

“I am allowed to ask everything, and I think that is wonderful. Unless I don’t humiliate the person, I can ask about exactly everything instead of thinking things out in my head because I ought to know.”

The conversation then begins to explore our various questioning practices further. Olivia, an American practitioner, notices the prominence of questioning in her work and in her life in general. Preciosa, a Mexican therapist, speaks also of each meeting with her client as “... a great opportunity to question myself...” and later, she writes of the continual reflecting that is part of her everyday experience of life. Several participants comment on the integration of questioning with collaborative practice. Pasha, a Mexican therapist, notices the way the questions emerge naturally from the particular dilemmas we encounter in our work: “The dilemmas people bring to me make me ask these questions. I always had the question of how useful or not I was for others.” As Pasha’s comment illustrates, collaborative therapists often direct questions at the practitioner and the process; the questions in collaborative practice are not only for the client to address. Aiden, from Australia, also resonates with the Pepila therapist metaphor. His comments give us a sense of the kind of questioning he welcomes; he is not using his questions to force resolutions and ensure particular outcomes:

“Another part of my experience of doing this work is the shared experience of the rock going off my back in terms of what I need to know before I start... There is not the need to resolve contradictions to end up at a particular place. And this involves hope and freedom, certainly hope. And trust in people’s ability to do their own work.”

Seferino, a Mexican therapist, speaks of increased enjoyment in his work when he is present as ‘himself’ rather than present as a knowing-best professional:

“Now I discover myself enjoying being there just being me, making things that I want to make, saying the things I want to say... The metaphor that Abelinda used about this guy with the stone on his back makes sense for me too.”

While we celebrate ‘not-knowing’ as a liberating readiness to engage with others and otherness in each present moment, we acknowledge challenges inherent in this way of being. Near the end of our group conversation, Jillian, from the eastern USA, describes difficult feelings she experiences “fairly often” as she practices from a ‘not-knowing’ stance:

“On the one hand I have the experience of “the stone is gone,” but on the other hand, I am often quite frightened—*fearful*—better than frightened. Because (*pauses*) the path is not so clear. And I am working to find this path. I don’t know what path I’m on, sometimes for quite awhile. So living with that uncertainty—it has all these beautiful things that everyone says and I wouldn’t give it up for anything. *And*, I have to accept feeling a little bit frightened, fairly often.”

And for Danica, a Norwegian practitioner, working from a ‘not-knowing’ stance frees the practitioner but at the same time increases responsibility for each dialogue participant:

“I think the client and therapist have *more* responsibility actually in this way of working because you do not have a model to take responsibility for what you are doing—you have to take more responsibility for yourself. And also the client must take more responsibility; the client must think about what is needed.”

Aiden speaks of relating to knowledge “tentatively and provisionally...” and others elaborate on the feeling of uncertainty and risk that accompanies them “like a person” (says Abelinda) in their work. You must dare to participate with your whole being, suggests Olaf. “In a true dialogue, each person—including the therapist—has to contribute with himself or herself. And that has been a real challenge for me—to dare to contribute with myself.”

Connecting ‘not-knowing’ with the project’s central question.

How do these multiple, partial descriptions of ‘not-knowing’ relate to our project question—“*How could you describe your practice as generative and transforming for yourself?*” It seems reciprocity *depends* on the practitioner’s ‘not-knowing’. The collaborative therapist is always open to further influence, ‘poised’ to learn, genuinely

curious, a full participant in a dialogic process of searching for ways to go on, alongside the client. Practitioners in this project speak of ‘not-knowing’ not only as a philosophy of life, but also as an activity they ‘do’—‘not-knowing’ as practice and premise, both. Never sitting ‘above it all’, “safely ensconced in knowing” (Anderson, 1997, p. 135), the Pepila metaphor shows the therapist as an exposed, vulnerable, visible, person, in the flesh, trusting, daring, feeling, moving around within a developing social situation.

Unlike the Pepila therapist, the ‘not-knowing’ practitioner primarily orients to:

- **Novelty:** Particular, practical, situational understanding instead of general, abstract, conceptual, propositional knowledge. *The practitioner trusts each conversation will be an unrepeatable, useful, first-time opportunity to learn. Instead of the tedious repetition of matching “treatment patterns” with “problem patterns,” collaborative therapists listen for specificity, uniqueness, and unfamiliarity and as such, their practices are a continual source of refreshment for themselves, not only for their clients.*
- **Flow:** Understanding as incomplete and open-ended—always on-the-way—instead of complete & closed theories, models, frameworks, methods, systematizations. *Knowledge as fluid, relational process rather than knowledge as a static ‘thing’ to be transferred from practitioner to client. The understanding of the collaborative therapist is always ‘in motion’, never static or complete.*
- **The present interactive moment** and its immediate living, relational context as the critical ‘epicentre’ of learning rather than the kind of knowledge acquired in advance of the practitioner-client relationship, and simply ‘applied’. *Knowledge in modernist practice is accumulated in advance and applied in session. Knowledge in modernist research contexts is built up after the interview, through analysis, interpretation, etc. But in a postmodern, collaborative approach to practice, understanding is generated within each present interactive moment—the emerging ‘now’ is where everything of importance takes place. Collaborative therapists make inquiry-based learning a central part of their everyday practices.*
- **“Spontaneous, embodied, response”** (Shotter, 2008); We generate practical understanding as we respond to our conversational partners and respond *into* the developing conversational context. *Instead of ‘applying’ knowledge established elsewhere, collaborative therapists “sense” and “feel” their way forward incrementally with their clients—very different from working from a pre-figured treatment plan.*

The ‘not-knowing’ way of being increasingly arrests my attention. I have come to see this feature as crucially preparing the practitioner to receive what philosopher David Abram (1996) calls “the nourishment of otherness” (p. ix).

Practitioners' Journaling Related to Practitioner Experience of Transformation

I begin this social inquiry project with both curiosity and confusion about the word “transformation.” When we say our work is “mutually transforming,” what might we be saying specifically? Is it possible to speak of the transforming influence of therapy conversation for ourselves using everyday, particular, ‘close-up’ terms? Is our transformative process similar to the classic caterpillar-hidden-in-cocoon metamorphosis? Is transformation a kind of individual, metaphysical state of transcendence or enlightenment?

1. Transformation as an unceasing process taking place within the *everyday*, *ordinary*, and *familiar* moments of our practices, our lives.

Instead of describing grand epiphanies, or offering novelesque stories with well-combed plots, the journaling of participants in this project takes us into fleeting moments, shifting, interactive scenes, unfinished stories; into feeling, sensing, and into bodily movement; into neighbourhoods, families, workplaces, and educational settings; into the minutia and micro-practices constituting our daily work. Transformation, once a lofty, abstract term, is demystified in this project, situated within the everyday, ordinary, and familiar moments of each day.

Our process of journaling draws my attention to the extraordinary that is present within each ordinary interactive moment, the element of unfamiliarity present within the familiar, and the first-time unpredictability inherent in the predictable ‘everyday’. Describing the dialogic process with Hanna, a young client with a first experience of psychosis, Olaf writes of the companionship and collaboration characterizing the work, even in times of silence:

“And when there was no answer, just silence—it became possible to be in it together! It became even possible, when silence was there, to ask, “How can we, together find out—what is the best way to go on?”

Olaf notices his day to day work with people in psychotic crisis has transformed his “personal view of psychotic behaviour.” He writes,

“Psychotic behaviour as a result of some kind of fear in contrast to psychotic behaviour as a result of an illness - this was a shift that perhaps happened some years before I met with Hanna, but it was very important to me. Instead of being afraid of psychotic behaviour I became interested, both intellectually and emotionally.”

Other project participants also connect the transforming influence of practice experience to the particular momentary interactions constructing their everyday work. Geovanna describes a shared, feelingful moment in her work with a mother and young son. She writes,

“We were able to connect and develop a common language instantly. The conversation had a wonderful flow and we were able to explore the issues and come up with specific ways to deal with them. Even now when I write the experience I feel the warmth in my heart as I see the changes in the boy’s face and the relief in his mother. The three of us finish our session laughing and joking.”

Emelie writes of a “very rare feeling” she senses in a session with a couple. “I find no words for the feeling, so I just say that I am glad to meet with them again.”

Noticing how her curiosity about people continues to grow as she gains practice experience, Pasha considers the uniqueness of each client-therapist interaction and writes of the constancy of transformation for the practitioner:

“The most beautiful thing, is that I realize that I find people more and more interesting, I am able to grasp their unique richness, their way of thinking... you realize you will never again be the same person, rather in each conversation you are different and you are transformed and consequently, you move and each time you can become more inquisitive about life, your own personal life, as well as the life of the person that is working with you.”

Transformation, as we construct it in this project, seems to be part of the unplanned “happenstance” of life, and of practice. Abelinda writes of the impact of a coincidental series of ‘infidelity dialogues’ have had on her as a person. As she reflects on the diversity of views her clients share regarding this topic, she notices:

“These ideas about infidelity cause me to think about many things about “life,” about life as a very uncertain thing, we don’t know what will happen.... These dialogues with couples have caused many of my ideas to shift regarding what life in general is and also about the couple relationship.”

Ana Claudia notes her many years of therapy practice have transformed her earlier way of being in her work: “I have ceased fighting with the world, in that I no longer feel such great responsibility for what others decide... It has taught me to be much more curious.”

2. Transformation as something we do together communally, rather than transformation as rare, private experience; transformation as “inter-action” and inter-being.

Abelinda writes of the challenge of noticing ‘what is happening’ to us and between us in our therapy conversations:

“In some ways we know that things are happening between us, but its not until we ask ourselves what is happening, that it becomes evident that something is changing...”

Abigail emphasizes transformation as occurring “through our relationship... through that which we do *together* (her emphasis). Elsewhere, as part of her tennis metaphor, she writes the following:

“Funny thing about playing doubles; you do adjust or “calibrate” your game with each different partner... Or at least you need to if you want to be effective.”

Once a far-away, abstract term, “transformation” becomes ‘peopled’ with faces, voices, bodies. Olivia writes of transformation as a communal process:

“Tonight I will attend a meeting of people interested in forming a drop-in/recreational centre for people with mental disabilities. The mother of one of my clients wants me to come see what they are doing. She has told me in the past that I am “different” from therapists she has seen for her own difficulties. My thought is that her view has to do with the collaborative approach I have taken to her daughter’s therapy process... My presence does... raise the question of “where does the therapy end and life begin? Or are they one?”

I think they think I will be in a mentoring role, whatever that is. I find myself curious as to how my role and my presence will evolve...”

Abigail, describing a group of clients meeting together with her to address experience of grief, emphasizes the communion with others that is part of transformation:

“The group has grown from 6 to 16 participants... This has proven to be one of the most unexpected and satisfying journeys. I am eternally changed by this experience... they teach me more than I can describe. There is something transformative going on between us all. An orientation of our Spirits. A sort of joint sanctuary...”

Olivia writes frequently of moments of connection—with her clients, with artists, with fellow practitioners. “Perhaps it is the creative connections that are most meaningful in collaborative work,” she journals.

“I had a “connecting” experience with a client and asked myself what made it so, especially since I was very tired and sleepy during the therapy session.... We connected in some unusual way today. It felt different somehow.”

Later she writes of the importance of sustaining the connections:

“On the topic of addiction, I am also aware that I do my best when I go slow with the client(s) and maintain a connection. What is it about the connection? What makes it so important? The connection seems to be at the heart of the work. How does the connection make for change? It seems to be, at this moment, that both the therapist and client must change through connection. But I cannot explain why or how.

It is like a jolt of electricity going from one to the other and back and forth until it dissipates, leaving each different than before.”

Similarly, Olaf writes of gaining trust in the relationship [between practitioner and client]. Abelinda also credits the relationship, not a “framework” for the generative influence of her work with one client, a university student, formerly in one of the classes Abelinda taught:

“...the type of relationship we were able to establish helped her, it allowed her to make decisions, it allowed her to see herself as a capable person...and for my part, it allowed me to enjoy a brief and fleeting sensation of success and to discover that I am an available and accessible person.”

3. Transformation as movement--‘horizontal’ movement—relational movement ‘across’—implicit in the interactions of encounter, acknowledgement, involvement, and response.

Collaborative practitioners are continually ‘traveling’ to meet and engage with others, like country doctors or midwives. Preciosa writes of this movement as “visiting” her client’s ideas and staying with them for awhile:

“Alfred is a 28-year-old client diagnosed with depression and Asperger. We have been talking about the dilemmas of having a diagnosis, how these descriptions represent him, in which ways and what parts. I could describe this process like

walking on eggshells. Each time we talked about a new description the first reaction is, “I don’t think so; the problem is that I am depressed.”

“So I take a step back, to his preferred description and we stay there. I am thinking about Bateson’s idea of moving from the familiar to the newness... I have been learning to stay there, to visit his [Alfred’s] ideas. In the beginning it surprised me, until I started understanding what works better for him.”

Emilie describes her effort to understand a young client, recently returned to Scandinavian society after growing up without her Scandinavian parents, in China. She too, is ‘visiting’ her client’s ideas, orienting herself within them:

“So many things were strange to me, that I didn’t know how to word any questions; I just watched this colourful tapestry as it developed and expressed my admiration.”

4. Transformation as relational movement ‘into’.

We are not only ‘with’ others, we are “in it together” with them, as Olaf describes. Geovanna writes of “tuning into” the style of her client, “letting myself flow with her story and her ideas...” Emilie describes her way of working as “so much a part of me, that its very hard to—when I try to describe it, it is illusive, it goes away.” Even her supervision work feels like an extension of her life outside her profession. After a wonderful meeting with the practitioners she is mentoring, Emilie journals: “I noticed afterwards that I didn’t feel like a therapist or a supervisor at all, I felt like a very very old, almost wise woman that they liked to have a chat with.” Abigail writes of her *clients* becoming “part of her.” She also writes of the integration of her practice and her life:

“Had an interesting informal dialogue today over lunch with my colleagues. The group was probably a good representative sample of the differing ... stances in the psychological community... in Southern California.

We were talking about “burn-out”... Wish I had tape-recorded the talk. I was definitely distinct in my position relative to the others. Acknowledging the wearying aspect... the exhaustion of opening oneself to feel and share feelings of my own... but burn-out is not a predominant result of this work [for myself]. I was aware of how fragmented many of them feel in clearly separating one’s professional “being” with their personal “being,”... I don’t experience this delineation really.”

Abigail, an accomplished tennis player, writes of the agility and focus required as the collaborative practitioner spontaneously plays *into* a conversational situation, keeping things in “play”:

“I occasionally thought of my experiences playing and watching tennis as similar to some of the skills I use coordinating action in therapy, teaching, and life. So please humour the sports metaphor... Like a tennis match, there is a back and forth quality to it...”

I have referred to our journaling fragments, at times, as *entering* stories. Entering into the life of another being is transforming. The client allows the practitioner to enter, and the practitioner, similarly opens to the in-fluence of the client. As Lynn Hoffman (2007) writes, referring to the Alice and Wonderland classic, we must jump “into the pool of tears with the other creatures (p. 66).”

5. Transformation as an embodied, visceral process.

We do not only open our ‘minds,’ but rather we are open to one another as sensing, feeling, moving, embodied beings. Practitioners in this project experience restlessness, fear, laughter, tears, a trance-like feeling, sleepiness, hesitation, uncertainty, “treacherous” challenges, “dreadful feelings of insecurity,” hope, warmth, admiration, and trust in their work. Tom Andersen (2007) describes therapy as bodily activity, stressing the importance of looking, hearing, and sensing (p. 166). Responding to others and otherness is not a purely intellectual, cognitive process. Anderson (1992) writes,

When life comes to me, it touches my skin, my eyes, my ears, the bulbs of my tongue, the nostrils of my nose. As I am open and sensitive to what I see, hear, feel, taste, and smell I can also notice ‘answers’ to those touches from myself... (p. 55).

Practitioners in this project demonstrate what Andersen (1992) refers to as the “intuitive” action of the whole body, not only the intellect: “... my body, ‘from inside’, lets me know in various ways how it thinks about what the outside touches; what should be concentrated on and what not” (p. 55). Collaborative therapists likewise are not present only as meaning-makers and thinkers: they participate as whole persons, with the fullness of their bodily abilities to sense, move, feel, respond, and anticipate.

6. Collaborative therapy as living, vibrant soundscape, teeming with influences.

From a distance, a collaborative therapy dialogue may seem unremarkable or ordinary—observers are likely to notice an absence of impressive professional terms and high-powered strategies. Olivia writes, “I sometimes feel “less than” because my approach is so simple and lacks the fireworks set off by others.” From a vantage point

within the dialogue, however, participants often find themselves totally caught up in the process; I often find seventy-five minutes feels like seventeen minutes. In our Playa Dialogue, Pasha speaks of doubting her work with one of her clients only to learn later, that he likened his therapy experience with her to “a party!”

Like every ‘genuine’ dialogue, the unplanned process of collaborative therapy is full of diverse and ever-shifting influences. Project participants write of influences such as, the practitioner’s inner conversation; a surprising moment; a newly emerging possibility; the client as an elicitor bringing forward aspects of the practitioner’s being; the conversation; the narration of a story; memorable ‘striking moments’ of connection; particular words; moments of silence; the ‘topic’ of the conversation; new relational bonds between dialogic partners. Each ‘presence’ affects the practitioner, inviting, coaxing, compelling, and sometimes “forcing” the practitioner to become something of the otherness surrounding the conversational participants.

Olivia writes, “The catalyst for change may be the client’s story, the therapist’s interest and the client’s response, etc.” Geovanna writes in detail of the way the client elicits different ways of being from her:

“I would like to reflect on the way I feel about myself or who I am drawing from the way I felt with three clients I met today. It is really amazing how different I felt with each one... Coming from the idea of the nature of the relationship and how each person you meet with “constructs” or “creates” or “highlights” “brings forward” a different you, or a different part of you.

This morning I met with the man where I feel the conversation we have together runs in circles...”

Emelie reminds us, “There are possibilities to learn from whatever the outcome of a session.”

Regarding Inquiry Process:

Twelve Inter-related Features of Collaborative, Practitioner-Driven Dialogical Inquiry

In this project, we aim to use our member’s methods of inquiry, that is, we use the unsystematic, conversational approach to inquiry characterizing everyday *shared inquiry* in collaborative therapy contexts. We are particularly careful to maintain an ‘alongside’ stance of witness in our project, and so we do not subject our dialogue “data” to formal systematic analysis or interpretive strategies developed in other contexts foreign to our

conversation. We do not ‘close’ our dialogic process and step out of it in order to ‘make sense of it’ from positions seemingly outside of it—we simply participate within it and thereby extend and enrich it.

I do not see the steps of our inquiry as “manualizable” or replicable in some future setting; just as every dialogue is an unrepeatable relational event, dialogical methods of inquiry similarly occur once only, emerging incrementally in response to particular relational and historical circumstances. At the same time, I imagine the dialogic premises and priorities informing our inquiry could be useful within a diverse range of social, qualitative research contexts. I would like to suggest that the inquiry approach adopted in this project contributes to the most recent ethical initiatives in social inquiry. Many of the features described below relate to how we position ourselves—how we relate to others and otherness—in our social inquiries.

In what follows below, I identify twelve inter-related features of our inquiry process potentially relevant to dialogic action inquiry beyond this project.

1. Dialogue as Speech Genre

Dialogue becomes the speech genre of the inquiry as the project author remains in a relational, participatory stance within the interaction of the inquiry from the start of the project to its finish point (Anderson, 1997, pp. 107-131; Anderson & Gehart, 2007; Bakhtin, 1986; Seikkula & Arnkil, 2006, p. 94; Shuy, 2003, Strong, 2004, pp. 214-218; Tyler, 1986). Dialogical inquiry, in contrast with an interview approach, is something we create together rather than something a researcher gleans from an ‘other’. Open conversation—where all parties are free to introduce a topic or raise a question—is a way of speaking most people use most of the time; as Shuy (2003) writes, people typically spend very little of their ‘talk lives’ in interview mode (p. 179).

2. Situationally-Driven Inquiry

Method emerges responsively and incrementally throughout the inquiry and cannot be pre-figured: Dialogic process is uncertain, unsystematic, unrepeatable, sensed collectively (Law, 2004; Shotter, 1993a, p. 45) and infused with risk (Anderson, 1997, pp. 135-136, 2007a, p. 40). Informal, intimate social poetic methods shape dialogic inquiry, rather than orderly, systematic methodology (Shotter & Katz, 2004b, p. 71). In other words, the mutual response of participants and the unique dialogic situation

produced from their interactions directly shapes process in the project instead of the project author selecting and applying a method formed in advance of the inquiry within a totally different context.

3. Generating Understanding through Spontaneous Response

“*Mutual responsivity*” (Katz & Shotter, 2004, pp. 71-74) also becomes the primary means to practical dialogical understandings—not scientific or systematic analysis, not representation, nor interpretation. “I try to learn about and understand their story by responding to them: I am curious, I pose questions, I make comments, and I gesture...” (Anderson, 2007, p. 47).

4. Respondent as Role

All project participants, including the dissertation author, function primarily as respondents, responding to each other’s utterances, and responding *into* a particular conversational context, “furthering talk” (Strong & Pare, 2004a) rather than turning talk into a static object for interpretation and analysis. Understanding and active response are simultaneous actions in Bakhtin’s (1986) dialogism; each depends on the other and makes the other possible.

5. ‘Striking’ Moments

Respondents open themselves to “striking moments” within the interplay of dialogue, unplanned, interactive “moments of meeting” (Stern, 2004, p. 169) that seemingly ‘move’ or ‘touch’ conversational participants. Working without outside process-directives or interview tick-sheets, conversation partners feel compelled to linger and further involve themselves with moments that arrest their attention; moreover, they are ready to be led by them. Inquiry becomes embodied, feelingful, sensual, and not only intellectual (Andersen & Jensen, 2007, p.166; Katz & Shotter, 2004, p. 76; Lakoff, 2007). This kind of dialogic social inquiry is familiar to us in our daily lives.

6. Situating Inquiry within the Present Interactive Moment

The inquiry is situated within ‘the present moment’ (Stern, 2004, pp. 75-111). Meaning-making happens ‘on the run’ within the bustle, commotion and movement of a living dialogue (Shotter, 2006a, pp. 29-30). Project authors extend the dialogue, keeping it in play, instead of closing it, stepping out of the dialogue, “de-relating” (Strong, 2004, p. 215) and “doing to” the dialogue using techniques foreign to the conversation.

7. Particularity Instead of Generalization

The inquiry does not attempt to identify a thematic hierarchy (themes, sub-themes, non- themes) nor a classification, categorization or cataloguing of participants' words or ideas. Respondents listen for novelty, surprise, detail and particularity (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 133; Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 244) rather than pattern and regularities. Dialogic practitioners do not meet people as though they are representatives of categories, but rather “cherish” their uniqueness (Strong & Pare, 2004a, p. 9). They do not allow professional knowledge to lead the process, but rather attune as directly as they can, to the client and the client's story, on the client's terms, within the client's familiar ways of knowing.

8. Developing Event Instead of Developing System

Dialogic inquiry yields a developing event, not a system (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 251) or structure: Inquiry becomes a “... collaborative effort with people rather than investigation of them...” (Gustavson, 1996, p. 90). “The important word here is “with”: doing with and within, rather than for or to from the outside” (Anderson, 2007, p. 34).

9. Direct, Open-ended Engagement

Distilling the ‘data’ happens intrinsically and spontaneously as certain threads are dropped or picked-up throughout the inquiry process of interaction. The project dialogues are not “winnowed” through systematic procedures of retrospectively ‘doing to’ the data. Participants, including the primary author, do not attempt to create interpretations of the dialogues (Sontag, 1966; Steiner, 1989).

10. Outcomes Emerge Throughout Instead of “Research Product” Outcome

Rather than developing representative “research products” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1039) or artificial devices (Garfinkel, 2006c, p. 128) such as models, frameworks, theories, or representations, “outcomes” emerge continually and unpredictably throughout the inquiry. Understandings generated are incomplete, fluid, and practical; “... in the process of trying to understand, something different is produced” (Anderson, 1997, p. 116).

11. Shared Authorship

Just as the primary author joins participants fully in dialogue, project participants join the project's primary author in creating a multi-voiced (polyphonic) and multi-textual (poly-textual) text; authorship is tangibly shared as distinct voices intertwine and intersect, each enriching the other. Each text enters into the project's central question in a unique way, with a unique voice, from particular 'in-motion' vantage points (Emerson, 1997, pp. 127-161).

12. "Capturing" Social Phenomena Re-Defined

"Capture" takes on reversed meanings; the process is less about the researcher capturing social phenomena and more about *becoming 'captured by'*:

When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us just as the beautiful captivates us. It has asserted itself and captivated us before we can come to ourselves and be in a position to test the claim to meaning that it makes (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 484).

In most qualitative research, the generativity of the project is ultimately demonstrated through the presentation of a finished, portable, "research product"—a model, a theory, representation or framework. In numerous qualitative traditions of inquiry, these research products signal a successful capture of the study's central focus. Like trophies, souvenirs, or other proof of contact, the end product in social inquiry offers readers "something to take with them," something to show for their labor in attempting to understand the research text.

Dialogical, collaborative inquiry is different. "Findings" and "outcomes" emerge incrementally and unpredictably all throughout. Instead of co-constructing a system, this project extends an invitation to participate, as respondents, in an interactive event. Our dialogues function simply as reminders (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001, p. 36) of things "which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes" (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001, p. 106) in the background of our practices. Each "reminder" offers a sensory, in-motion glimpse of the collaborative practitioner's experience of practice, one that is always changing, partial, never complete or finalizable. As we noted earlier, Wittgenstein (1980) likens that which is inherently incomplete to "scattered color patches on a screen; if we complete them, he warns, we falsify them" (p. 52). Through our involvement with the collective of practitioners in this project we gain a tangible sense of the collaborative

therapist's experience of therapy practice as "generative and transforming;" we gain a "witness" rather than "aboutness" understanding (Shotter, 1999a; 2005b), a practical, multi-voiced, dialogical understanding of the dialogues at the center of this project. Just as qualitative social inquiry informs therapy practice, the dialogic premises and practices of collaborative therapy can shape and enrich qualitative social inquiry.

Concluding For Now...

I would like to connect our workshop 'ending' with one very special moment of struggle in our beginning dialogue in Playa del Carmen. Some of the practitioners in our group raised questions about the 'do-ability' of our study. How can we describe processes so much a part of us—like fish describing steams (Woolf, 1995, p. 14)? Others questioned the possibility and the value of putting experience that is *beyond* words into mere words. How can we speak of those aspects of our practitioner lives that are unspeakable without distorting or diminishing them in some way?

I still resonate strongly with these misgivings, and yet, from our current vantage point, we can see that our attempts to articulate practice experience have been fruitful. When we begin a sustained dialogic inquiry—spoken, or written, or both—into the background ambiguity of daily experience, we begin to notice detail previously missed. Writing and speaking in response to our project's central question heightens our awareness, influencing not only how we 'see' or understand our practice experience 'intellectually', but also, most important, how we sense, and feel, and move our bodies in spontaneous relation to all the living otherness present within each therapy conversation. When we speak in rich detail of our practices as generative as transforming, we make them so. Participation in this dialogic inquiry process wakens us to the reciprocity present in each interactive moment, to the abundance of influences, visible and invisible, inviting us to irrevocable change. Our words are never 'just words' after all.

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