

Therapeutic Resources as Professional Resources

Claudia Mastache, PhD

Abstract

In this paper I want to argue that some of the therapeutic resources that psychological therapists usually use to carry out therapy can also be used in other *professional contexts*. I will focus in particular in the case of two therapeutic resources in Postmodern Collaborative Approaches to Therapy, namely: (1) the *Philosophical Stance* and (2) a *Collaborative Attitude*, which can become companion resources for professionals in general and for the researcher in Social Sciences in particular.

Keywords: Therapeutic Resources, Social Sciences' Researchers, Philosophical Stance, Collaboration.

Background

The increased specialization (Jacobs, 2014) in most fields of knowledge can sometimes obscure the degree to which the resources in one discipline can be of use -and with great effectiveness- in other professional fields, since professionals will show a tendency to spend most of their time within their specialized field. With the up-coming of *specializations* the different disciplines can sometimes risk becoming *discipline ghettos* where, for instance, the same specializations world-wide could be in most education cases teaching the same basic skills and competences to their students yet, in practice, it becomes very difficult and in many cases almost impossible, to practice as a professional in another neighbouring discipline, country or state than the one you originally did your training on. The resulting situation is that the different *discipline ghettos* will behave in Higher Education as though they were all speaking different *professional languages*, when, in fact, and especially after many years of living alongside the *World Wide Web*, they are all probably speaking -for the most part- the same *professional lingua franca*.

The same situation seems to be happening when trying to practice officially as a professional in another field different to the one you originally graduated from. Given the current tendency of disciplines to become *discipline ghettos* it has become very difficult for the professional in one area to practice in a neighbour or an extremely related discipline. Aspects of this situation in the disciplines can be appreciated when, for example, looking at the basic requirements for an academic job. When applying for an academic job, the candidates may possess all the competences and skills the recruiters are looking for, but in most cases, if they don't have the credentials to become a member of the *discipline ghetto* in question, even if they provide evidence of the skills and competences required, they probably will not even be shortlisted for interview.

Conferences, Professional Associations, and the fields of Clinical Psychology and Counseling Psychology are good examples for further understanding the idea of professional groups sometimes behaving in ways that would resemble a *ghetto* in some of its characteristics. For instance, many times, the people the professional will be likely to meet at conferences are other professionals who are already members of the professional group in question. Without acknowledging the fact that *diversity* happens in academic professional environments, it is also true that more and more the professionals of a certain discipline may resemble *clones* in the way they speak, think and relate. The *professional clone* feature is not bad *per se* since, for instance, it allows administrators to process professionals in a way that will make sense. The notion of *professional ghetto* also makes reference to the great difficulty in becoming a *member* and to how once the professionals become *members* they may tend to stay in that professional group.

This writing will address a different scenario, where once professionals are members of a certain professional group, they can go out of their *discipline ghettos* and the resources from their original professional field can be of great help when performing other professional roles than therapy. For

this purpose I will analyze the case of *the Philosophical Stance* and a *Collaborative Attitude* in postmodern therapies when used in the field of Research in Social Sciences.

Themes related to this paper are: Professional Relationships, Healthcare Education as this can usually relate to research findings, and Community and Healthcare Connections as these connections are usually needed for research in Social Sciences. The paper also aims to present a *collaborative* and productive way for *research relationships* that can become available for researchers in general.

The *Philosophical Stance* in Postmodern Collaborative Approaches to Therapy

Features or characteristics of the *Philosophical Stance* mentioned by Anderson (1997; 2007) include:

- (1) Conceiving the therapist and the clients as *Conversational Partners*.
- (2) Thinking of the therapist as a *Facilitator of Process*.
- (3) Thinking of the therapist as *A Guest* in their clients' lives.
- (4) The role of the therapist albeit *active* is not *directive*.
- (5) Not-Knowing.

Similarly, aspects that are usually related to the *Philosophical Stance* are an attitude of *respect*, *curiosity* and *humility*. As I understand it, when the professional therapists work on these and other characteristics related to the *Philosophical Stance*, they are expected to be working on a *way of being* for when they relate to their clients. This new *way of being* is supposed to help throughout the flow of the therapeutic conversation, negotiations or exchanges, and it will help creating an environment where new and more satisfying *stories* for the clients will be more likely to emerge.

The notion of *not-knowing* has been associated in the Social Constructionist Therapy literature with offering for the professional therapist a *state of mind* alternative to that of relating to the clients from a *mindset* invaded by their professional *expertise* frameworks, thus shutting down to the details and features that can make a case unique (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992).

The *Philosophical Stance* when Researching in Social Sciences

Characteristics or features of the *Philosophical Stance* such as the ones mentioned above can be very helpful when a professional is carrying out other roles than therapy. Examples of professional roles where the *Philosophical Stance* can be of great help include: a Researcher In Social Sciences, a Research Interviewer in Social Sciences (including Mental Health Research and Marketing Research Interviews), a Recruiter of Research Participants in big and small research projects (including Randomized Control Trials), a Reviewer of Scholarly Work, a Creator of Feedback, and a Mentor Meeting with Students in Higher Education.

Taking as an example the role of Researcher in Social Sciences, some features of the *Philosophical Stance* can be very useful. A researcher may be in need to recruit research participants for qualitative or quantitative research projects and recruiting research participants in Social Sciences requires social interaction. If the researcher is carrying out research in the role of a qualitative researcher, they will be required to engage in social interactions when recruiting and when carrying out interviews. On the other hand, a senior researcher may be in constant need to relate to and socially interact with more junior or new researchers.

Whether involved in supervising junior research colleagues, recruitment, or interviewing for social research interactions (some recruitment procedures may require interviewing), the researchers may view themselves and their research participants as *partners in conversation*, both engaging in a

conversation so that a research in a certain topic becomes possible, both working toward the shared goal of making the research possible.

The researchers or recruiters may also see themselves as *facilitators* of the recruitment or research process, as opposed to, for instance, positioning themselves as *educators* of the research participants or the more junior researchers; when relating as a *facilitator* the interaction outcome may still be related to *education* and *learning*, it is just worth trying to get to the outcome of educating another person from a different role than the ones usually associated to *educators*, since some of these roles may carry some hierarchical weight, which could become unavoidable when interacting with another person. This characteristic requires work from the part of the researcher or recruiter so that they can come up with *verbal formulations* that will become useful, for instance, when explaining the research projects, when obtaining *informed consent*, or when introducing an *interview schedule*; this work would imply creating *verbal formulations* on a certain topic that would match more a professional stance of *facilitator* than that of an *expert educator*.

When recruiting or interviewing research participants, the researchers may see themselves as *guests* in the lives of their research participants. Most research in Social Sciences requires from the researchers to have access to some aspect of the lives of their research participants; whether it is in the form of a questionnaire on their use of a certain drug, an interview on their life experiences regarding domestic violence, or a log on their exercising activities, most of the time, a researcher in Social Sciences will have access to some aspect of the lives of their research participants. When the researchers position themselves as *guests* in their research participants' lives, this could have an effect on the *verbal formulations* or *discourse* they will be more likely to use, and, as most guests would do in Social Life, on the *respect* they could be likely to transpire and show. The research participants are not the servants of the researchers; rather, the researchers are lucky to be allowed into the research participants' lives at a given moment.

The researchers in Social Sciences may consider themselves *experts in the process* of engaging their research participants (whether it is recruitment or interviewing) as well as any other expertise they may have. On the other hand, the researcher may benefit from considering the research participants' collaboration as an *expert's collaboration*: for instance, the perfection that certain interview answers may have, the perfection and detail of a *life story*, or the perfection in a certain psychological profile are only possible when the research participants share their *lives' expertise* with the researchers.

Another feature of the *Philosophical Stance* highlights how the professionals are not passive or directive, but instead *active*. In reality, all aspects of the *Philosophical Stance* mentioned above are part of ways in which a researcher may be active; however, other ways in which the researcher may find themselves being *active* albeit not *directive* include: (1) actively relating to research participants holding an attitude of *respect* and *curiosity* to what they have to say; (2) taking any chance possible to *empower* the research participants so that they can feel how important it can become for them and for other people having their voices added to the research; and (3) providing instructions without sounding domineering or patronizing.

The resource of relating to the research participants from a *not-knowing* stance can be associated with the constant efforts reported in the research literature (Chenail, 2011; Mays & Pope, 1995) so that the *professional researchers* are able to avoid and/or to address and/or to work on their *biases* when enquiring the field or research participants. Whether a researcher is carrying out qualitative research interviews or carrying out quantitative research, to relate to the research participants from a stance where the researcher humbly acknowledges they cannot know what the research participants will say or do, can be of great help when working on *biases*. Relating to the research participants from a *not-knowing* stance may also help for the researchers' presumptions not to contaminate or cloud a narrative, testimony or answers to a questionnaire that a research

participant may provide. Some questionnaires in research in Social Sciences can be so complicated that they require for the researcher to interact with the research participants significantly in order to explain certain sections or questionnaire notions; under these circumstances the challenge for the researchers is to be able to explain topics and interact with their participants from a stance where they can explain and inform, as opposed to contaminate and cloud any of their participants' eventual contribution.

The notions of *humility* and *curiosity* are probably easier assimilated if they are coupled with the notion of *not-knowing*; if the **professional researcher** humbly accepts what they cannot know, they are working on their *humility*; if, in accepting what they cannot know about their research participants, they become excited about learning about their research participants, they will be working on their *curiosity*. In theory, any researcher should possess the quality of being *curious* about anything that can become an answer to their *research question*.

On the other hand, the research participants, the researchers, the principal investigators and the editors of a journal where to publish the research results are all part of a *bigger picture*, which is the research process itself. Apart from the usual hierarchical position associated to these scenarios, it is possible to see the different roles required by a research project as *cogs* that are all equally necessary for the research project to become possible.

A research manager used to say to their researchers who had to liaise with health professionals: '*we are just the researchers*'. The feature of *humility* and its related features of *curiosity* and *not-knowing* can be also illustrated when reflecting on this '*being just*' nature of each of the research roles; this way, for instance, a principal investigator may relate to their team with the humbleness resulting from acknowledging (not necessarily publicly, but just relating from this *mindset* may help) that they cannot possess the amount of experience in the ground that their junior researchers may be gaining for the project in question, whilst they have been involved in doing other principal investigator tasks.

Under a *cog* vision of the research roles, this '*being just*' may apply to the other research roles, in such a way that the research participants '*are just the research participants*', the junior researchers '*are just the junior researchers*', the senior researchers '*are just the senior researchers*', the principal investigators '*are just the principal investigators*', and the journal editors '*are just the journal editors*'. Each role is *just* their role, but conceptualizing each role as a necessary resource (as a *cog*) for the research, opens possibilities for more democratic interactions when researching in Social Sciences. In these cases the word '*just*' is not *downtoning*, downgrading or patronizing as it can be found doing many times in talk (Molina & Romano, 2012; Weltman, 2013), but the word '*just*' here is *uptoning* (Molina & Romano, 2012) by means of expressing *accuracy* and *precision* and, in doing so, it brings balance for the *equal footing* in **research relationships** (London, St. George, & Wulff, 2009) to become a real possibility.

As I will develop in the following section an *equal footing* has been described in the therapeutic literature as a guide when relating in a collaborative way (London et al., 2009). The following section will address the second resource I aim to explore in this paper, which is a *Collaborative Attitude*.

A Collaborative Attitude in Postmodern Collaborative Approaches to Therapy

An important feature of the Collaborative Approach to Therapy is the notion of *collaboration*. As it will be shown below, this notion is often associated with an attitude, with a type of relationship, and with some particular type, way or manner, of having conversations in postmodern therapies.

Some characteristics of a *collaborative relationship* and a *dialogical conversation* mentioned by Anderson (2007) are:

- (1) A particular way in which we relate to and with others that invites the other person into a 'shared engagement, mutual inquiry, and joint action'.
- (2) A social activity, partnership and process, where all members will have a sense of participation, belonging and ownership.
- (3) A process of trying to understand another person.
- (4) A relationship where the therapist cannot know the other person or their circumstances in advance.
- (5) A relationship where the therapist cannot know the outcome in advance.

Similarly, some of the *guides for collaboration* mentioned by London et al. (2009) are:

- (1) Equal Footing
- (2) Hospitality
- (3) Finding a Comfortable Location
- (4) Feedback and Adjustment to Feedback
- (5) Lasting Outcomes
- (6) Open Space: Do What the Occasion Calls For

When looking for the noun *collaboration* in a Dictionary (Spooner, 1993) we find definitions such as: 'concerted effort, cooperation, partnership (...)' and 'teamwork'; when looking for the verb '*to collaborate*' we find meanings such as: 'band together, cooperate, join forces (...) team up' and 'work together'. Synonyms that can be found in the dictionary for the noun '*collaborator*' include: 'associate, co-author, colleague (...) helpmate' and 'partner'. When commenting on the origin of the word *collaboration* it is often mentioned that this word has a Latin origin: '*collaboratio(n)-*, from *collaborare*' where the Latin verb *collaborare* means 'work together'. All these definitions evoke the notions of working with someone, jointly and together, and they also imply those working together will be doing it from an *equal footing* (e.g., see the meanings of: colleague, helpmate and partner).

What I will argue in the following section is that the notion of collaboration as an attitude, relationship and particular way of having conversations with others can be very useful for the researcher in Social Sciences.

Collaborative Research Relationships and Collaborative Research Conversations

Whenever encountering their research participants, the social researchers can engage with the participants in a collaborative way. Whenever encountering research participants, a relationship is created between the researcher and the research participants; though this relationship may be less permanent than other types of professional relationships, it can still become collaborative and share some of the characteristics of collaboration described in the previous section.

The ***research relationship*** can be seen as a joint action aiming toward making the research possible; as mentioned in previous sections, even if the identity of participants is usually protected by Data Protection guidelines, it is possible to grant ownership of the research to the voice of the participants, thus them becoming a voice without which there would be no research, thus their voice belonging to the research process.

The ***research relationship*** can also be a process where the researcher and research participant are *trying to understand each other*; whereas the researcher will be trying to understand any input coming from the research participants, the participants will need to understand what the research is about (this happens for instance whenever the *informed consent* is taking place). And it is well

known that the fact that we are able to enunciate a thought or idea does not mean that it will be understood straight-away by whoever is reading or listening to it; thus this ‘trying to understand each other’ is something that will characterize research discursive negotiations, for instance, whenever carrying out qualitative research interviews.

The notion of *not-knowing* previously mentioned as a characteristic of the *Philosophical Stance* is also relevant when having *collaborative research relationships*. In research it is possible to have *hypothesis*, the notion of hypothesising requires for the person making the hypothesis to not to know the answer to their query; even if we may end up *knowing* something at the end of a research project, it is also true that often we do not know the research participants or their circumstances ‘beforehand’, and before we carry out the research, we cannot really know what the outcome will be. To predict and to hypothesise presupposes a circumstance of *not-knowing beforehand*.

To relate to the research participants from a *mindset of not-knowing and equal footing* does not nullify the researcher’s role. What is argued is that relating this way can generate collaboration and flow for the aim of jointly working toward making the research possible.

Research relationships where the researchers can display *hospitality* and where the research participants are able to feel *hosted* by the researchers can also be a guide for collaboration when doing research. Even if it is a one off experience (and this often is not the case, i.e., *longitudinal studies*) it is possible to work towards making feel the research participant as *hosted* by the research, which in turn favours the sense of belonging and works towards collaboration.

It is true that the features in talk often associated with collaborative conversations (e.g., the silences, the order in taking turns, the respectful formulations, the framework for the conversations) are less likely to emerge when living under precarious and under-resourced circumstances. To be a researcher in Social Sciences usually means that the basic needs of the professional will be covered and thus it is likely that the research conversations will take place in *comfortable locations*. However, there are occasions when the *research relationship* –and I do believe this is also true for many psychological therapy clinicians in the World- will take place in less comfortable locations by nature, for instance: when carrying out research in the street, or when working in some psychiatric wards. What is proposed here is that even when the circumstances are difficult, it can be very helpful if the *professional researchers* make all they can, to generate a comfortable environment by the way they relate and with the suggestions they can make (e.g. suggesting to move to a more quiet spot, finding a bench to sit down, and so on).

The guide for collaboration of ‘*feedback and adjusting to feedback*’ is something related to the *flexibility* and *adaptability* needed when carrying out professional research and it is also something that some qualitative researchers are very used to do, for instance, when they carry out Action Research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). When used in the *research relationship*, i.e., when relating to research participants, working towards making possible to generate feedback from the research participants and adjusting to this can help during the process of jointly working toward making the research possible. For instance, when a research participant refuses to answer questions or when they refuse to accept a gift card in exchange for their participation in the research, the researcher is receiving feedback through these denials and they can either adjust to this (e.g. making a note and moving onto the next question, or trying to find out from the research participant what other *research incentive* can the researcher give to the participant as a way to express gratitude for their willingness to take part in the research, but in any case not making a problem out of a participant refusing to answer a question), or they can become rigid and resistant to the resistance shown by the participants, thus more than likely the situation becoming a hindrance for the research process. Needless to say, there are *research contexts* where resistance from research participants could be more likely to emerge (e.g., some types of *Commissioned Research*).

As mentioned in the previous sections, it is possible to highlight to the research participants the importance of their input for other people, which in other words means that the outcomes of the participation in the research will become *lasting outcomes* for: the research participants, for other people and, many times, for the world (e.g., research in cancer).

Equally, there is a possibility for the researcher in Social Sciences to work under an *Open Space* and displaying words and actions (or relating) according to '*what the occasion calls for*', which is a feature I also see related to the qualities of *flexibility* and *adaptability*. Again, in research we may have interview schedules, hypothesis and be guided by pre-suppositions or feelings about an issue worth researching. Even when this is the case for many research projects in Social Sciences, it is still possible to be *flexible* and *to adapt* to what the *research circumstances* are presenting.

When first confronted with the notions of *not-knowing*, *equal footing* or the research participants being *experts* in their lives, it may be easy to assume that collaboration means one should give up on their beliefs and professional knowledge. This is not really the case, since, as was mentioned before, relating to research participants and other research roles *collaboratively* and from the *Philosophical Stance* does not at all nullify the professional value of the researchers. Rather, when relating from these understandings, a space is created in the research relationship, which allows for the *flexibility to adapt to the occasion*. It is well known, for instance, that many research protocols change throughout the research process and some researchers can refer to the research process as a *learning space*, which could not take place was the attitude of the *professional researcher* an attitude of *rigidity* instead of *collaborative*¹.

To work in favour of an *Open Space* does not mean either that the *professional researcher* has to be doing what the occasion calls for any time during the research process, instead of this, this feature is just another guide, which can be used if and when needed; it is a reminder for the researcher to not to lose *flexibility* and to not to forget the importance to adapt to the circumstances (e.g., when research participants do not show up, or when they display resistance otherwise).

The *research relationship* is needed because the research cannot be done by the research participants on their own, nor it can be done by the researchers on their own. Even when the same person is both their research participant and the researcher -as it can happen in some phenomenological studies (Bergum, 1991)-, the person enacting these two roles has to come out of one role before coming into the other, since he or she cannot really behave as both roles at the same time or *synchronously*. The research has to be a joint achievement and both, the researcher and the participants, have to participate in the research endeavour for it to become possible, in this sense, it has been relevant to talk about a *collaborative research relationship* as well as about the importance for the researcher to work on ways of displaying their *collaborative attitude* when engaging in *collaborative research conversations*.

Discussion

It would be naïve to state that to relate to your research participants and colleagues in a collaborative way and bearing in mind aspects of the *Philosophical Stance* is easy; working on the *footing* (Goffman, 1981) or standpoint from which the researcher relates to their colleagues or participants may prove easier said than done.

In spite of the fact that postmodern ideas have been going on for a while now, postmodern scholars are still a minority world-wide; even though qualitative researchers are very popular in their own circles, they are still a minority world-wide. A few months in the current world-wide

¹ Another example where researchers display *adaptability* is usually the *pilot* stages of a research process where, for instance, the *interview guides* or *questionnaires* can undergo significant changes.

academic job market in the fields of Education, Sociology, Clinical Psychology, Counseling Psychology and Psychology, will allow the reader to verify these assertions. The majority of jobs currently in the job market are not for qualitative researchers, nor for postmodern scholars. The fact that you can count tenths or hundreds of professionals in your own professional circles does not make you a professional majority world-wide. With certainty, the current circumstances in the academic job market I just mentioned, do raise questions about: How ethical is it for Academic Program Managers to be delivering programs (including Masters and PhDs) which, for instance, would only focus on a specialized area within qualitative research, or programs that would leave out teaching quantitative research methods, due to their emphasis on postmodern ideas and the compatibility these may have with qualitative inquiry?

In addition to not being a majority, we live in a world which is not postmodern or collaborative by default. Whilst it may sound easy to hold a *Philosophical Stance* in other **professional contexts**, outside of the postmodern and constructionist circles, we are bound to find discursive and behavioural tendencies, which many times can make it extremely difficult for the professional to hold their postmodern stances and beliefs. When faced with these social circumstances, it may be useful to think that the fact that something is extremely difficult does not always make it impossible.

Conclusions

There are some therapeutic resources that do not pose any ethical problems, when used in other **professional contexts**. It is clear that there are other therapeutic resources and tools which can be very helpful for the researcher in Social Sciences, for instance, *mindfulness* exercises (Brown & Ryan, 2003) or *exercising* (Berger & Owen, 1988) can help when trying to manage nerves before meeting research participants and when preparing for research presentations. Nevertheless, the purpose of this paper was to explore how the *Philosophical Stance* and a *Collaborative Attitude* –associated with the Collaborative Approach to Therapy- can become useful resources for the researcher. On the other hand, it was argued that several of the characteristics discussed in this paper (e.g. curiosity, not-knowing, seeking feedback and adapting to it) are characteristics that anyone claiming to be qualified as a **professional researcher** would be expected to possess and, thus, to be able to display in interaction.

In many countries the path toward being able to talk to therapy clients and do therapeutic work is long and costly not only in terms of money, but also in terms of the processes getting *licensed*. There are however other professional fields where interacting with other people such as clients is less difficult and where, even though the ending result of the interaction is not supposed to be therapeutic, some therapeutic resources and tools can be used. By using some of the therapeutic resources in other professional fields than therapy, the interactions involved may benefit a great deal.

When I did my PhD I learned that it is exciting to learn *what words do* in talk, because once you discover a certain use of language, you can then add it to your verbal repertoire and use it. Adding to this the notion of *responsibility*, once you know what a *responsible use of language* is, you can then increase your repertoire of *responsible uses of language* to the degree that this is possible. I believe the same applies to some therapeutic resources, once you know what a certain therapeutic resource does in social interactions you can add it to your bank of social interaction resources, and use it in a responsible manner in your different professional roles. The above is obviously only possible for some of the therapeutic resources, not for all, and only if you are a member of a **discipline ghetto**; it is only in the scenario of being a full member of a professional group that it becomes possible to go out of your subfield and use your skills and competences in other subfields or fields of current professional practices.

From where I stand, I believe that to relate to the different research roles in a way similar to what I described in this paper is an example of a responsible way of relating, yielded by an understanding of research in Social Sciences as a bigger picture or machinery with multiple *cogs*. The image of *cogs* helps understanding each role as an equally necessary element for the bigger machinery to work and this understanding also makes possible to relate to others as described above. Though extremely difficult to practice in this world for the arguments presented in the discussion section of this paper, it is a way of relating worth trying when researching in Social Sciences.

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