

Gianfranco you keep me smiling! **Ideas from a conference in Århus**

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Gianfranco's death was untimely and shocking. He is someone who lives and laughs and smiles--- and he still does. The speed of his thinking and irony just does not go away. Every time I think of him, which is often, I see his face coming up with yet another brilliant unexpected and often irreverent reflection or comment. He leaves me smiling and in a state of wonderment as to how he has these ideas! Often brilliant with enough fit to really confront ones thinking! I just loved it! It challenged the very premises and prejudices I had lived by.

I was privileged enough in 1995 to teach a summer school with him as Ulf Korman's guests in Århus, Sweden. It was a delight – every morning we woke up and walked the beach discussing the day's teaching – which for one reason and another never actually got done, as we followed the group and ended up in a totally different place. The morning walks and talks in them selves were challenging and thought provoking. He questioned all my ideas and practices and challenged any social or moral issues I brought up, particularly about women and child abuse. His questions and so-called irreverence took my thinking to a different level. Initially I saw it as irreverence and perhaps not taking the situations seriously enough, perhaps being Italian and not really understanding the context. How wrong I was – he was way ahead of me, he made me re think the way I approached situations that I felt morally strongly about and it has been a great help, as it has helped me to put my prejudice of dignity for all to the fore, before other prejudices of injustice or abuse.

But Gianfranco created a thread through the workshop, which was about Systemic principles and practices. These became core beliefs for him as to how he was thinking about systemic thinking and interweaving the consequent therapeutic actions.

Systemic Prejudices (SP)

We live in language and in relationships with stories

Therapeutic Actions (TA)

We can deal only with stories and relationships

SP Blame magically stops systems evolving
 Blame blocks out the other voices

TA It is always possible to re-describe the story without blame

- SP Opportunities create constraints and constraints create opportunities
TA Look for contradictions for opportunities to emerge and constraining myths to emerge
- SP Respons-ability is awareness of the consequences of the prejudices one chooses
TA Keep away from deficit and victimisation language
- SP Human communication constantly travels through multiple levels of prejudices
TA Constantly reflect on the prejudices that are informing your actions
- SP Every system even the most apparently deranged, has a coherence that keeps it alive
TA Respect and be curious about the coherence before trying to change it
- SP It is impossible not to have prejudices
TA The best way to reflect is through commenting on the therapeutic system
- SP Emerging stories can produce dramatic changes.
TA Show wondrous delight at the emergence of new stories and opportunities
- SP Any therapeutic attitude can become a problem
TA Be **useful** not helpful, caring, controlling, pitying, changing
- SP Emergence of stories is energised by the curiosity of the therapist
TA If you lose your curiosity go back to previous statement
- SP People are caressed by stories
TA Be cautious - stories are contagious, there is a danger of marrying your hypothesis
- SP The only safe place to be promiscuous is hypothesising or story creating
TA Keep co-creating stories, be aware of your loyalties to prejudice you hold dear and be irreverent.
- SP The grammar of any communication involves both content and process
TA Enter people's grammar so they feel understood and can go further
- SP Identity is a mosaic of countless voices and stories that we tell (of) ourselves and others tell of us
- TA Invite people to reflect on the stories they tell of themselves and the stories others tell of them.

Ideas from a conference in Århus

SP Coherence and truth do not hold forever

TA Use temporal truth

At the end of the workshop these were the principles we had co created and role-played. There was so much, that was far richer and deeper than Gianfranco gave us: he gave us a way of being, of playing, of being respectful and of creating therapeutic change without that being a strong intention.

His first statement about always being in relationship was perhaps the strongest and one he gave most credit for. During our morning strolls he talked about the early Milan days and particularly his relationship with Luigi. He felt they had been counter points and their different approaches and ways of thinking and working had been a huge asset. They had been able to discuss their differences and understandings and from these discussions both of them had developed ideas. It had been a very rich relationship and exchange.

Gianfranco, Thanks for being you and inspiring us all to enjoying what we do, being playful and being able to laugh with our clients, learning to challenge and be irreverent, to make the impossible statements which somehow fit the context. Au revoir, but your smile and impish face and words of irreverent wisdom, will never leave me

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