

Brief Encounters with the Taos Institute

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Collaborative-Dialogic Practitioners as Infiltrators



By Monica Sesma, Taos Board Member

I feel so fortunate over the last decade to have met the most talented and brilliant colleagues. Inspired by the work of Harlene Anderson, collaborative-dialogic practitioners influence, impact and transform the relational spaces they nurture and ideas they co-create with others. I have witnessed how collaborative friends and colleagues are magnificent *infiltrators* transforming practices within communities and organizations either in therapy, education, supervision, policy, research, and other fields of practice. I have been observing and participating, and asking myself, how are they able to do that? Here are some thoughts:

Curiosity as Advocacy

In general terms, advocacy implies supporting other people and helping them express or communicate their ideas and perspectives, and supporting them standing up for their rights. Collaborative-dialogic practitioners feel confident in asking questions, particularly difficult ones. They become genuinely curious, and this helps them to open dialogue and collaboration. For example, I have been in different spaces where we are selecting people for different roles. I have seen structural racism and policies that affect immigrants, refugees, BIPOC people and marginalized groups. When I witness social injustices in this selection processes, I start asking difficult questions: How long ago was this policy created? Who were the writers? Who decided this? Why are international students not able to...? How are we deciding who can become a member and who cannot? What ideas are influencing our current decisions? From within, let's be infiltrators and start asking challenging questions to advocate for others who have less power.

Not-knowing as Revolution

We can understand revolution as any attempt of a group or community to change the “political system” of their country. However, revolution happens in other areas too: arts, science, psychology, therapeutic practices, etc. For me revolution is about transforming dominant and oppressive practices and, of course, is political. Harlene Anderson (2005) has largely discussed the term “not-knowing” and the most critical connotation for me is the emphasis of people making meaning with each other and recognizing that dialogue is an interactive process where new meanings and understandings are produced. Collaborative-dialogic practitioners seek to create space for dialogue to co-create change. For example, to create more diverse spaces, they are very intentional about making people feel welcomed, valued, appreciated, visible, and important. Collaborative learning communities are a great example of this intentionality. At the heart of collaborative practice we aim for opportunities to create polyphony and embrace a variety of wisdoms, acknowledging and being in conversation with multiple voices and views. From within, let's be infiltrators and make new meanings for a more inclusive and equitable world.

Radical Listening as Disruption

In a world dominated by micromanaging, dictating, and prescribing how to practice in our fields (how to teach, how to do therapy, how to do research, etc.), I find that radical listening and radical presence (McNamee, 2015) can be amazing disruptive actions that challenge traditional ways to practice and it provides opportunities for people with whom we relate to expand their imagination, and open their eyes, minds, and ears to the novel, brave, and unrestrained ways of being. From within, let's be infiltrators and allow ourselves to be amazed and inspired by others and make them feel heard.

If you are interested in learning more about collaborative practices, please consider joining the ICCP 2021 Congress, June 5 to 26: <https://www.collaborative-dialogic-practices.net/welcome-1>

You will be delighted to know that Harlene Anderson, Sheila McNamee, Ken Gergen, and Jakko Seikkula are the guest speakers for the opening session on June 5th.



References

- Anderson, H. (2005). Myths about "not-knowing". *Family Process*, 44(4), 497–504. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2005.00074.x>
- McNamee, S. (2015). Radical presence: Alternatives to the therapeutic state. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling: Beyond the Therapeutic State*, 17(4), 373–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2015.1094504>