

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute June 2023

Community In Conversation

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We, Marilene (Brasil) and Adela (Argentina), met in the field of Family Therapy around 30 years ago. Since then, we have continued to develop our interests in dialogue, collaboration, and particularly our desire to work with communities. In Integrative Community Therapy (ICT), we found a methodology to support our goals and dreams.

This approach developed by Adalberto Barreto, Brazilian psychiatrist, theologian, anthropologist and family therapist, can be understood as a social and political practice that generates community conversational spaces and the exchange of experiences and knowledge among people, favoring social transformation, inclusion, and respect of differences. ICT has become a successful way of responding to the suffering of people living in extreme social and economic vulnerability, far from mental health centers and with low educational levels. These conversations usually take place in community locations like churches, schools, health centers, etc.

During the pandemic, we offered ICT online. This allowed us to enter people's homes (virtually) and invite them to be in conversation with others, to share not only their problems, but the creative ways they were facing their social isolation, the fears of the contagion and the pain of losing close friends and relatives. ICT became a messenger of hope, encouraging people to be supportive of one another and to find ways to take care of themselves while navigating troubled times.



Welcoming the polyphony, the community created by ICT provided an enriched and trusting environment that opened possibilities for sharing intimate and even very painful experiences among people in a public setting. For example, in an ICT round facilitated by Marilene, a man in his 60's shared, for the first time, the abuse he suffered as a child and his wish to put an end to his life as he had no good reason to stay alive. In this meeting he was welcomed by the community and could listen to other ICT participants who also thought death could be a solution

to end suffering but who decided to go on and found new meaning to their lives. ICT focuses on possibilities and honors the wisdom of communities. By listening to one another, people find their own possibilities to overcome conflicts, challenges, and crises and at the same time, build social

support networks for themselves. ICT, as a collective practice, generates relationships and fosters the activation of the therapeutic ability of the group itself. It helps participants to see their suffering as a human experience, instead of a pathology. ICT is a practice that was proposed in response to the demand from the community; it honors the folk wisdom and cultural values, democratizing the knowledge and favoring inclusion and a sense of belonging.



ICT allowed us to experience, both as participants and as facilitators, the enormous value of witnessing in the voice of all the participants, the human resources always present as a product of the experience of living in relationships. The most fantastic aspect of this conversational process is that, when one shares his/her knowledge in the art of living, rhizomatically, he/she activates the resources of others.

You can read more about our experience with Integrative Community Therapy (ICT) in the recently published book, *Collaborative-Dialogic Practice* and our chapter, *Community In Conversation: Generating Collaborative and Dialogic Conversations in Community Context*. For more information about INTERFACI Catholic university, visit: www.interfaci.com.br. For More information about FUNDACES, visit www.fundaces.com.