Challenging Deficit Models of Parenting – Collaboration as a Project of Possibility

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The Story of Marija (fictitious name)

- Marija is a 29-year-old, working-class single-mother of a primary-school child. She has escaped from routine, brutal violence of the physical, psychological and sexual kind.

- Physically and mentally scarred, Marija approached me with her story and with her determination to live and love despite her frightening past.

In Conversation with Marija

- I could have immediately referred Marija and her child to the competent authorities and to the various services available.

- However, I realised that Marija was determined to reclaim her humanity on her own terms. Marija was not for fixing. **THIS IS WHERE THE DIALOGUE STARTED.**

The dialogue continues...

Marija is a **resource person, together with others,** in many of my training sessions with prospective as well as in-service professionals.

Aspects of my narrative as a trainer of professionals

- The story begins with a firm belief that my position as trainer is **not neutral**.

- Location provides me with a moral and ethical framework that is open to ongoing interrogation as I recognise my **unfinishedness**.

Basic assumptions that permeate my training

- The historical reality of **humanisation**.
- The belief in humanity's potential to become more fully human.
- People's reading of the world and behaviours are shaped by their interaction with their material environment which is unjust and asymmetrical.
- **Dehumanisation**, a human construction, can be reversed through constant reading of the world and action on the world.

Basic assumptions

- Social Work/Youth Work/Community Development/Education firmly rooted in the **sociality and materiality of humanity**.

- This requires a **deep understanding of the material world of parents and parenthood**.

Basic Assumptions

- The Youth, Social/Youth/Community worker/educator as an **intellectual-activist** and not simply a worker.

- An individualist/personalised/psychologised approach may contribute to further **domestication of parents** rather than to their **liberation**. Change is **communal and collaborative**.

Prescription as counterproductive

- Challenging **prescriptive** relations and their effect on the socialisation of professions, professionals and parents alike.

Problem-posing approach to professional development

- Training engages with parents as 'subjects' rather than as subjects-objects. **Knowledge is not only known but also experienced**.

Participatory practices (Drysdale and Purcell, 2001)

- Neighbourhood maps
- Life maps
- Issue maps
- Resource maps
- Power maps
- Storytelling
- Tree of life

Multi-modal pedagogy

- Photographs
- Drawings
- Diagrams
- Montage
- Story telling
- Theatre of the Oppressed

Project-based learning

- Community-based projects that are informed by the generative themes of the community.

Learning communities

- Learning communities as viable ecologies of transformation.

The quotidian character of learning communities

- Communities begin in the **everyday lives** of the members of the community.

- There is no community without **curiosity** about the other. We form communities because we are curious about each other…we are curious beings.

- It is through the exercise of **curiosity, genuine interest in the other** and **active listening** that authentic communities form.

- Communities of learning are an **ethical duty not a charitable act**.

- Communities as **ways of knowing**. Knowing in communion…knowing in co-production and in co-discovery with the other

- One cannot think of communities without thinking of **power**.

- This is the initial context for **sustainable development and change** within the community.

Communities and empowerment

- Communities of learning are founded on a process of **empowerment** and **participation**.

- School members are empowered by experiencing power sharing through authentic communities.

- Communities as ongoing processes of listening and speaking.

- Only those who listen speak (Freire, 1997).

- Communities in **dialogue**.

- Empowerment involves a form of **critical education** that encourages people to **question their reality**: this is the basis of **collective action** and is built on principles of **participatory democracy** and **cognitive justice**.

Communities of reflection and action

- A critical approach calls for a unity of **reflection** and **practice** (praxis). In this way theory is generated in action, and in turn action becomes more critical through analysis.

Reactive communities

- When learning communities are not self-reflective, their practice is dominated by the policy and political context. **They become reactive rather than active.**

Partcipatory democracy

- Authentic communities are fashioned by participatory democracy and the democratic values of **respect, dignity, reciprocity and mutuality which together form a practical framework for checking the validity of what communities do in the name of community development**, from personal encounters to collective action.

Communities and social justice

- **Equal worth** of all participants
- **Equal right** to participate and to be heard
- **Equal Opportunities** to participate
- **Elimination of barriers** to participation

Institutions as moral communities

- Learning Communities
- Collaborative Communities
- Caring Communities
- Inclusive Communities
- Inquiring Communities
- Communities of Responsibility
- Communities of Practice

Authentic Dialogue as a Viable Pedagogy for Learning Communities

- **Authentic dialogues are acts of freedom, rejecting the image of the superior and inferior and replacing it with autonomy and responsibility.**

- **Authentic dialogues are acts of human solidarity.**

Authentic dialogues

- **Families engaged in authentic dialogues are spect-actors rather than spectators or actors.**

- **ADs are acts of creation and recreation.**

- **ADs constitute processes of negotiation and renegotiation.**

- **ADs are an act of critical discovery.**

- **Hopeful enquiries.**

- **Anxiety, tension, unpredictability and pain are part of the process.**

Authentic dialogues

- **One cannot intervene in the world when the pedagogy generates passivity.**

- **Resolution of the teacher-student contradiction; both are simulataneously teacher and student.**