Roleplaying as Participatory Inquiry for Research and Learning

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Working from within the theories and movement often called the *dialogical* or *relational turn* my paper throws light on the development of a participatory research inquiry based on roleplaying. The inquiry is particularly inspired by action research, and aimed at enhancing dialogical and relational skills among leaders and employees in an organization. The inquiry had the aim to develop and refine a dialogically based collaborative learning practice. The practice is based on the assumptions that central to organizational collaboration and the development of fruitful relationships are processes of dialogic coordination, which are at work in the continuous process of organizing. The important challenge is whether our ways of communicating can, for example, bring diverse people or groups into productive coordination, ease or eradicate conflict, motivate and inspire people, or handle the emotional dynamics that bring people together or push them apart. Often we tend to communicate in repetitive patterns and construct scenarios that can either move in a degenerative or generative direction. In the project we worked from a transformative approach where alternative ways of communicating and relating as living, responsive, embodied beings were explored in a playful, collaborative learning setting.

In my paper I will unfold our findings and the methodological aspects of this approach. The project is rooted in a constructionist stance toward research where qualitative research inquiry is considered a collaborative effort for generating change oriented insights and knowledge (see also McNamee & Hosking 2012; and Gergen 2015). In this context the researcher is seen as a change agent. As a researcher with a professional background from theatre and consultancy I defined my role as that of a *reflective inquirier* as opposed to an “objective observer”, which historically has been the research ideal in the positivist tradition. The aim of the reflexive inquiry was to develop skills in dialogue,
relational awareness, meta-reflexivity and collaboration among leaders and employees in an institution caring for neglected adolescents between the ages of 13-18. The duration of the project in practice was one and a half years.

The project had the aim to explore and refine an entirely collaborative learning practice (see also Wenger 1998) and Deweys (1916) term: Learning-as-practice) for the enhancement of relational and dialogical skills. The idea was to enhance the competences among the participants as reflective practitioners (Schön 1983). The practice should pay special attentiveness to the use of language and as well the bodily dimensions of communication and therefore the inquiry was based on roleplaying with reflecting team in a dialogical based setting.

Furthermore the project draws on the heritage from drama (in particular Augusto Boals writings on forum theatre and forum play 1979, 1995) and systemic inspired supervision methodology (Gianfranco Cecchin 1987, Tom Anderson 1991, and Karl Tomm 1987-88, 2014) and, as well, on the theories of dialogue developed by Wittgenstein and the Bakhtinian school, which have been taken further by Kenneth Gergen, John Shotter and Ann Cunliffe.
References


