

Appreciative and Generative Perspectives Points of Convergence in a Productive Dialogue¹

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This article proposes that the interaction between generative and appreciative dialogues enhances the ability to create novel opportunities, giving rise to virtuous cycles of transformation that enable the emergence of new interpersonal, organizational and social worlds and realities.

Appreciative and generative dialogues are a set of perspectives and methodologies useful to interpersonal, organizational and community practices which seize opportunities that emerge in dialogues and other social spaces. These processes are conducive to generativity, inclusion and appreciation on the part of participants. They enhance the ability to create novel opportunities, giving rise to virtuous cycles of transformation.

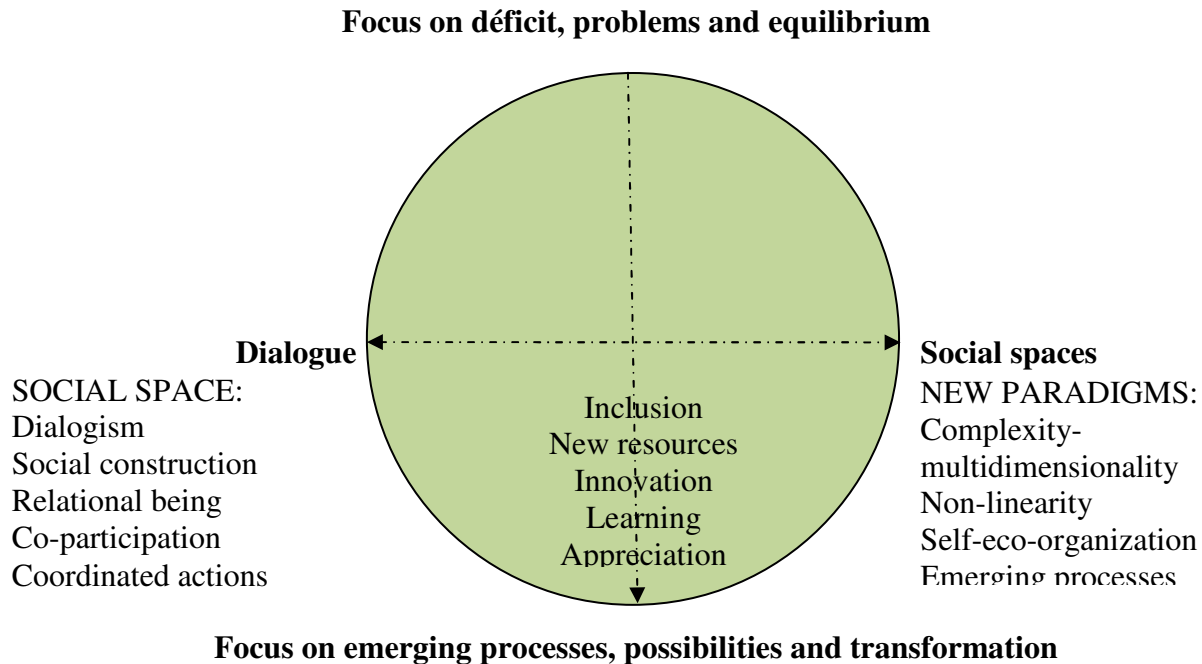
“Dialogue” is a space of social generativity, an instance of coordinated social action in which individuals interpret and construct meanings and practices, recognizing each other as co-participants. Thanks to a perspective focused on the non-linear, multidimensional and self-eco-organizational dynamics of these spaces, participants can orient themselves towards emerging, unique and random events while being aware of possibilities, resources and strengths, and furthering transformations that could lead to potential alternative future directions.

Dialogism, social construction, and a set of epistemological perspectives broadly known as new paradigms form the epistemological foundation for generative and appreciative perspectives and methodologies (Bakhtin, 1981; Fried Schnitman, 2002; Fried Schnitman & Schnitman, 2002; Gergen, 2009; Magruder Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011; Morson & Emerson, 1990).

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Social space as generative field



Insofar as it initiates generative processes, the starting point for appreciative dialogue is accomplishments, previous moments and actions understood to be valuable and self-fulfilling for the subjects involved, and capable of initiating generative cycles that might provide platforms for transformation. Generative dialogue inquires into innovation, creativity and random events that might provide new avenues for transformation and useful resources, while expanding social worlds and renewing relationships as starting points for transformation. Expanded alternatives and new ways to approach events emerge as relationships and realities are transformed for the sake of possible futures that, in turn, foster new forms of dialogue in enacted personal, organizational and social realities steeped in a sense of appreciation and recognition.

Generative dialogue

How new possibilities that emerge in interpersonal, community, organizational and other relational processes can foster a generative perspective? How can participants contribute to the generation of those processes? What can they initiate, recycle and learn from current and previous experiences? By means of a strengths-based approach, I wanted to find ways to use the resources that clients brought to bear on the process, ways to expand and further what they were already doing well. I found in generative and appreciative dialogues and inquiries a response.

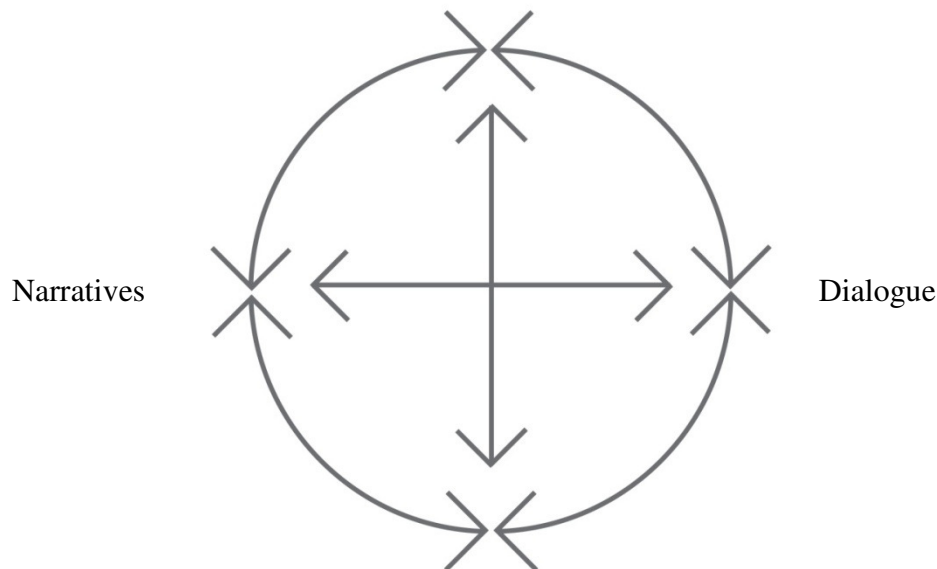
Within this framework, I used the term *generative process of dialogic creation* to refer to the gradual construction of something new by means of reflexive dialogue and conversational learning in human groups. This is a transformative process in which people or groups come to see, experience, describe, position and coordinate actions in a different way. This approach regards meaning, values, experiences and knowledge as constructed in social spaces where specific events, acts and episodes have the potential to transform patterns of social relationships from within: new realities, matrix of meaning, and novel practices can take shape through emerging processes, generative questions and cycles, imagining futures and contextual events that have an impact on the beliefs and dynamics of social groups.

I have been interested in specific episodes that have the potential to create new meanings and if they expand through generative processes, can provide alternative contexts for interpretation and social practices. Generative inquiries focus on how these episodes and cycles are created: How does something new emerge and take hold? How is something capable of transforming or becoming a context for a novel practice or meaning? How can new conversational spaces be opened up? What discursive and social coordination fosters these developments and heightens the power of new meanings and actions? Which are the emerging narratives? Thus, the dynamics of generative processes involve: spirals of dialogue, inquiries, narratives, learnings and acknowledgements (Fried Schnitman, 2008, 2011; Fried Schnitman and Rodríguez-Mena García, 2012)

Generative process

Has a dynamic which involve:

Generative and appreciative inquiries



Learnings and acknowledgements

Moving beyond our limits

Generative inquiry was developed to increase clients' awareness of their innovations and resources, allowing them to recognize possibilities, opportunities and new avenues in the expansion and transformation of themselves and their circumstances. Appreciative inquiry follows a different path: participants' recognition of positive and appreciated performances leads the way to hope, dreams and future possibilities, as well as ways to make them happen. Generative and appreciative inquiries are based on responsible self-involvement and collaborative co-participation; both have the potential to move us beyond the limits of what we say, think or do and to expand our familiar embodied forms of life.

Generative inquiry inspires people to come up with new descriptions, to transform relationships, and to help themselves and others grasp and cope with difficult or challenging circumstances. Professionals facilitate generative and appreciative inquiries using dialogue, relationships, and joint social actions as means of connection, innovation, and alternative coordination of action. The generative and appreciative processes are transformative and conducive to participants' ability to learn about themselves, the dilemmas they face and the processes in which they are involved as well as the opportunities, results and possibilities that those processes afford. These approaches reposition people in relationships as subject-agents who can harness their ability to learn and innovate in order to handle the diverse problems that life presents and build alternative futures.

Innovation through dialogue and learning

In these models, dialogue is viewed as generative. It facilitates a *co-constructed process* in which previously unimagined options for addressing difficult or challenging situations emerge, transforming how they are experienced to allow alternatives to become feasible. Such transformation allows for creative action to take place as the client reaches his or her goals. In this process, learning occurs when participants explore the actions they could take or have taken, the choices they could have or have made, and the values that guided them and informed their choices or the choices they could have taken. On this basis, clients proceed to design a different present and future.

Opportunities are opened up by *generative spirals* that emerge in and through dialogue, as well as from recycling, experimenting and scaffolding learning into new knowledge. In a generative dialogue, emerging processes and transformations can gradually fortify alternatives and conversations take a productive turn. A generative cycle links learning and innovation through different types of constructive procedures including:

- Focusing on innovation, subtle changes, and unexpected possibilities
- Innovating by developing links in dialogue between thematic nodes and practices, and scaffolding those nodes
- Developing new themes (nodes) and practices by transforming comments or peripheral events into main themes and practices, or by bringing them into new syntheses and platforms; this can mean bringing different themes

together to form new meanings, values and realities that allow for the design of new possibilities and futures

- Discovering the novel in and from the existing situation and expanding it to give shape to episodes for possible transformation
- Introducing visions of the future that can initiate new circumstances in the present
- Reaffirming subjects and their coordinated dialogic-actions as producers of knowledge, practices and new designs on the interpersonal, community and organizational levels
- Formulating meanings and narratives capable of opening up visions and landscapes for action

We can construct new futures on the basis of our ability to innovate and experiment, by expanding on our implicit knowledge and using it in innovative ways. We find ourselves better able to improve our actions and/or our understanding of those actions as they take place, to be able to find alternatives and possibilities.

There are many potential points of departure for generative cycles. Regardless of how they begin, all *generative cycles* involve working dialogically in social spaces by fostering observation, experimentation and projection, reflection, recognition of innovation and enactment of new possibilities. Similar ingredients used in a different order can be found in AI and are an empowering source of novelty, wellbeing and new resources.

Generative inquiry and transformative dialogue

Generative and appreciative inquiries are sets of theoretical and practical guidelines to facilitate emerging possibilities in dialogical process. Both focus on generative and appreciative questions, which are used to explore the construction and recognition of resources and possibilities. The questions expand the participants' abilities to recognize what they have done well, on the one hand, and the available resources, whether implicit or explicit, on the other. These questions are used in a dialogical and relational process to inspire innovation and produce novelty, and to enhance knowledge and possibilities. The questions foster experimentation, discovery, learning and effective communication.

Through generative and appreciative questions, we are able to move towards expanded resources; a *new matrix* of meaning and practice; personal, relational, and organizational enrichment, as well as innovation and change. Generative and appreciative questions are intended to inspire practitioners to consider alternatives that might be helpful in dialogue.

The generative and appreciative processes in motion

In generative and appreciative inquiries, participants produce new connections and understandings in dialogue, increasing their ability to identify the novel by exploring what they know in unprecedented ways. Participants recognize and describe the steps that lead to results, linking them to options, choices and diverse possibilities. Through reflection, new possibilities and their implications become clearer.

Comparing actions, descriptions, experiences, results and contexts – identifying the similarities and differences between them – gives shape to a *blueprint* or emerging design that accounts for the actions taken and the knowledge acquired; this is an endpoint rather than a point of departure, since it is constructed during and through the process. It requires creativity, improvisation, as well as research in action.

When participants in generative or appreciative processes engage in active inquiry: they explore novel possibilities and procedures. In practice, active inquiry is a situated learning process. We learn to recognize, to see difference – novelty – and, in so doing, we inquire *a posteriori* about these moments.

What a generative or appreciative process leads to –the roads the “novel” opens up– involves both past and current resources and a projection of future possibilities. A relationship to a situation is always dialogical, transactional and transformative: what we try to understand is what we are constructing or transforming; the situation is understood precisely as we try to change it, giving rise to a process of investigation in action and the acquisition of new knowledge. In both cases a generative dynamic is set in motion.

A generative position

In generative or appreciative processes, communication and learning reconfigure the place of each participant. Participants become members of a collaborative team that learns from its own processes, a community interested in and capable of inquiring into convergence as well as difference, using diversity generatively to develop resources or to create possibilities.

The solution to problems becomes fieldwork conducted by these collaborative teams of professionals and participants, or by participants themselves, outside of the consultation context. They do research *in action*, in order to better understand the spectrum of alternatives available and the novel resources they bring with them. In a process that integrates resolution and creativity, participants can go through previous experiences and select what has been useful and what can be recycled, transformed or created. They reflect on this process – what is happening, what opportunities are available, what procedure works, what they want for themselves and for others involved. They propose alternatives that will potentially enrich the experience of all participants and enable new emerging realities.

Participants in processes of this sort not only engage their emotional lives in new ways, but also regain power, insofar as they reaffirm one another as capable of generating

options, learning and advancing in the desired direction. Thus, they can recognize, evaluate, modify and experience their operational possibilities at different levels: they can review their responses and select alternatives by evaluating the context and examining their constructions and how those constructions are enacted. They recognize the models, guidelines, and criteria by which those constructions are produced, as well as the purposes and values that organize their perceptions and actions. Through this process, participants further an operable understanding as they become aware of and monitor what they initiate.

Participants learn how to learn, how to create new designs, plots, solutions and procedures to transform their circumstances and themselves through co-action, dialogue and learning. In sum, they participate in the creation of new personal, interpersonal and social worlds.

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