

Elements of Dialogic Practices

This bite is the second of a series of seven documents that offer a first introduction to the approaches that will be adapted to the homelessness field along with the HOOD's project life: the Dialogical Approach and the Enabling Coplanning. They discuss topics ranging from epistemology at the basis of the approaches, the core principles of the two methodologies mentioned, and the key elements that characterized them. Overall, they facilitate the progressive comprehension of the two approaches considered, also providing tips for further readings.



The expression “Dialogic Practices” refers to a psychosocial approach born to take in charge of people with mental suffering with more efficacy. The key instrument of Dialogic Practices is the Open Dialogue, developed by a team of professionals led by J. Seikkula, B. Alakare, and J. Aaltonen, since the beginning of the 80s. The same meaning of dialogism is a first core element: being dialogical does not mean being dialoguing, but it rather primarily refers to a specific consideration of the relationship between subject and object in the meaning construction (see bite n.4). According to Dialogic Practices, existential difficulties faced by the person turn into opportunities to shape and redefine the net of stories, identity, and relationships that constitutes the “self” and of one's social world. Dialogic Practices aims at activating a process of co-development of meanings through the listening and comprehension of the other's point of view. In each dialogic activity, the discourse's object (the problem, the need, the intervention...) is defined not by a unique voice, but a multiplicity of voices (polyphony). They are in an equal relationship with each other: none of them can give the real, ultimate, and true account of the event or the situation. Indeed, each needs the others to shape the meaning of what is happening. The assumptions of this intervention model define its application dimension. From the point of view of power redistribution, the dynamic whereby the social worker defines the best path for the person and expects him/her loyalty to this proposal is removed. An effective power redistribution also ends the opportunities of defining strategic alliances (see bite n.6) aimed at changing what the other sees, thinks, and does, but it opens up space for building authentically dialogical relationships. At the same time, when the social worker is freed from all the evaluating tools based on the assumption that he/she owned the clearer definition of the situation, he/she will need the real engagement of all the people involved (see bite n.5). Moreover, giving up the evaluation, finding out new ways to define the life pathway is needed: this is where the Anticipatory Dialogues come in.

“For the practitioner, being dialogical does not mean to be kind. Being dialogical and rude is much easier than being dialogic and positivist”.

Further reading: Seikkula J., Arnkil T. (2006), *Dialogical Meetings in Social Networks*.

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