



Pranas Chile: How do we do What we Do?

Reflection derived from reading Jeff Zimmerman's article¹

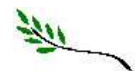
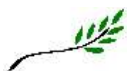
Ítalo Latorre-Gentoso

Introduction: Imaging, resonance and katharsis

Jeff's text resonates and challenges us as Pranas and me in particular. I decided to write this text as a reverberation to some of the invitations and challenges proposed and I will do it in *resonance* format. I will not construct a dialogue or a discussion with Jeff. Rather, I will take certain points that struck a chord with me/us, captured our interest and evoked concordant images that generated kathartic movement. These points are: the critique of the narrative police; the critique of the construction of an orthodox narrative therapy; the importance of speaking out against what we find colonizing and abusive (although this is my interpretation of the tone of the text) and; the importance of returning to the critical and disobedient origins of our practice.

With this resonating, I take the liberty of structuring a text in three parts. The first, prompted by the questions: What would be that which some of us call narrative therapy? How could there be a policing of something so ductile? And, is there something we are interested in taking care of in what we do? These questions arise in my mind because for there to be a police, there must be a territory of surveillance, which in this context would be a sort of "narrative prison". So I wonder if in the practice we do there can be such a territory and who would define it. But also, in this part, I ask myself if what we do is distinguishable from other things we do and if we are interested in collectively taking care of the foundations of that. The second part is associated with my personal history with the narrative, with the community of ideas and practices, but also with the community of people. And finally, a reflection and an accountability on behalf of Pranas, considering the fact that we have been at the center of many contexts in

¹ Narrative Orthodoxy and Hegemonic Power: An Evolutionary Perspective: https://www.journalcnt.com/uploads/9/4/4/5/94454805/2_narrative_orthodoxy_and_hegemonic_power_-_an_evolutionary_perspective.pdf. Spanish translation: [Ortodoxia Narrativa y Poder Hegemónico: Una Perspectiva Evolutiva](#).





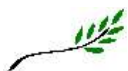
which the practices of narrative therapy for individual, group and community work have been shaped to a large extent by the choices we have made about how to share it.

Part One: What is narrative therapy?

In this first part I will attempt to articulate a reflection around a question that has many ways of being answered. As this text is written for a context in which it is likely to be read by people with some familiarity with this field of practice, I decided to shape an answer that goes a bit beyond what has usually been written about it, including myself. To accomplish this purpose, I will strive to use language that is as clear as possible. I would very much like to have the abilities of David Epston and Michael White to express in simple terms very complex issues, but this is not the case, I hope you will help me with your reading to make sense of what I am trying to expose here.

I will start with a broader landscape, what are we talking about when we talk about therapeutic practices? Therapeutic practices in general would be, for the most part, the derivation of a series of understandings about human action: *how is it that we come to do what we do, feel what we feel, emote what we emote? How is it that the action, the expression, the movement of us human beings is articulated?* The answer to these questions usually results in a series of practices whose form would be given by the assumption of these conclusions as truths. This question has been answered in multiple ways. The most traditional and hegemonic ones have had to do with the invention of metaphysics, the production of grand narratives with the status of truth, such as the *unconscious* of psychoanalysis, or the *personality disorders* of psychology and psychiatry, the *zodiac signs* of astrology, to name but a few; political fictions that are self-assumed as universal truths and that have operated as frameworks of intelligibility of *human action* or what has more usually been called *behavior*.

When we try to answer these questions, therefore, a relational phenomenon is generated: we produce the knowledge of that which we intend to describe, and this production of knowledge occurs with greater or lesser legitimacy depending on which institutional platforms support it within the dominant culture (expert or popular professional). Although professional culture is increasingly penetrating popular culture and it is more and more common to hear people describing their



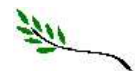
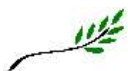


subjective experience through the DSM or the ICD or demanding their therapist to "find their diagnosis", without even knowing what these books of fiction are about.

This production of descriptions is then put into practice in therapeutic conversations and produces certain forms of action based on these understandings: the therapeutic models.

In this context, narrative therapy could be understood as a *counter-technology*, since it would be occupying the power platforms it tries to subvert, I am referring to therapy, psychotherapy, clinical social work, psychiatry, among other institutions of what is known as "mental health". I say subvert because narrative therapy - unlike the vast majority of practices associated with this field - would be at the service of the development of *local knowledge*, which has been historically subjugated by these institutions based on the imposition of *expert knowledge*. These expert knowledges (*such as disorders or personality structures, for example*) are invented in certain contexts (*scientific institutions*) in which they are self-validated (*scientific research validated by science in scientific institutions such as academies of social sciences or universities, for example*) through verification apparatuses created by the same institutionality (*scientific research methodologies invented in and by scientific institutions*) with the purpose of giving truth status to the knowledge they are inventing. That is, a story is invented and then studies are carried out to verify the foundations of this story using methodologies also invented on the basis of these stories. To do so, phenomena from the subjective experience of people, their feelings, their actions, their thoughts, etc., are taken as a point of reference and are loaded with the meanings of these stories, metanarratives or political fictions, making them intelligible through these invented truths or, following Preciado: (in)existences (2022). I like to call this type of production of knowledge and subjectivities *autophagic*, *incestuous* or *narcissistic* (the latter in its strictly mythological sense).

Then comes the putting into practice, its relation with the world, that is, when we do therapy or, more precisely, when we are talking to people in contexts that bear the name of therapy or similar. These understandings and practices are impacted and modified by the world to which they respond (to a greater or lesser extent depending on the truth status of the metaphor underlying the ideas). In turn, these practices, shaped more or less by the world, also modify the world,





giving it forms that are more similar and harmonious with the understandings that shape the practices, for example, if a person has experienced abuse and expresses pain, the latter can be constructed as the expression of a pathological human nature or as an action with a meaning constructed in relation to its socio-relational history (protest, denunciation, complaint, claim, raising one's voice...).

So, what is known as therapy would be a way of building relationships under the assumption that what we do is not innocuous, that every action gives a particular shape to life and relationships and that every action, or even expression, is relational (White, 2000). Then, I think it would be important to briefly address the word *therapy* given its political nature. When we speak of therapy, we speak of the exercise of power, therefore of power relations (Foucault, 1988). That called therapy would imply a particular context of power relations, a fictional place of relations that are invented and made possible by institutionalized social conventions in which some bodies are assigned and authorized to exercise the role (according to professional identity).

Narrative therapy would then be an exercise of institutional power with the potential to be exercised in any context that validates that institutionality. When doing narrative therapy -as in any other therapy- what we would be doing is participating in contexts of power relations that produce subjectivities, in which our participation is advantageous, since our knowledge about human experience has a great potential to shape the understanding that the people involved in the conversations will assume as their own.

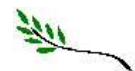
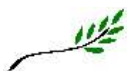
But then what would distinguish narrative therapy from other forms of therapy? How might we come to identify common points of reference that might serve as a guide or compass for taking responsibility in this exercise of power in the name of therapy and in this case, more specifically, narrative therapy? I believe that what could serve as a criterion of discernment could be the act of identifying and naming the foundations of their practices, or what with Carolina we insist on teaching as *responsible convictions*. Identifiable where and how? This question also cannot be answered with a universal slogan. But perhaps one place could be in the subjectivity of those who participate in the conversations. For example, if we take as a reference the responsible conviction that *the person is never the problem, the problem is the problem*, the fact that a person after participating in therapeutic conversations no longer identifies completely with the problem as





they had been doing and opens a space to turn their interest in the exploration of their relationship with it, reconnecting with their sense of agency, expanding their territory of life and making their participation in it visible, then perhaps we could suggest that we are exercising power in the relationship with narrative purposes and commitments. And then the question becomes urgent: Who defines what the problem is? Someone in the role of therapist might define that the problem is homosexuality and externalize it so that the person returns to their "cisgender hetero nature". Would this be narrative therapy? For some people it surely would, if it is understood that this is a set of techniques at the service of any political project. For me, for Pranas, and I hope for anyone reading this text, it is clear that this is *not* narrative therapy, since it would not be accountable to any of the political positionings at its base (or responsible convictions).

Others might claim that it is indeed narrative therapy, but put at the service of the dominant culture, which would be a tricky, poor and limited argument. Would what I am doing here be a form of "policing"? I emphatically believe it is not. When we try to define something we engage in relational practices of discernment and sometimes identity politics. Neither is narrative therapy anything that is done in its name, nor do those of us who are or can define ourselves as narrative therapists (as totalized identity) exist. I believe that what there are people trying to articulate their practices based on understandings that have been built primarily on the work of the co-founders of what has come to be called narrative therapy. In this attempt, we are not only practicing narrative, we are also putting into action a series of subjectivities derived from our political experience in the world (all the living somatopolitical fictions - or identities - that inhabit us). Do practices of narrative therapy always result from this? Surely not, in the same conversation we can have attitudes, responses, comments and questions that reproduce patriarchy, capitalism or colonialism, and then step back and ask a re-authoring question or initiate an inquiry around the mutual influence of a person's preferred relationship of life. This does not make us less or more narrative, it only evidences the political complexity of our experience, unable to act outside the dominant culture in an absolute way. Is what we did narrative therapy? Yes at times... not at others. Perhaps what matters most is the more general movement a person has experienced after a conversation.

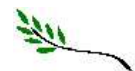
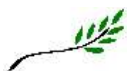




To return to the example of externalized homosexuality, I believe this is not narrative therapy because narrative therapy implies a rich understanding and knowledge of dominant discourses and a critical/subversive positioning in the face of them. A narrative practice could be from my/our understanding, one associated with the investigation of this person's experience in their relationship with homophobia and other forms of abuse, for example.

Narrative therapy would be a therapy whose way of interpreting people's subjective experience would be based on the narrative metaphor, understood as a network of stories that are assumed as constitutive of life. Furthermore, considering that it does not matter from which mouth each narrative comes out, since these also have *access policies*, that is, the power relations that are put into operation for the visibility and wider availability of some narratives (dominant, hegemonic) to the detriment and subjugation of other potential narratives (alternative, preferred, subjugated, local). In this unbalanced relationship of power, some narratives of the subjective experience of life, relationships and action have more possibilities than others to serve as a framework of intelligibility. The dominant culture produces these narratives from its hegemonic institutions, in which we could include psychiatry, psychology, clinical social work and others associated with what Preciado (2020; 2022) condenses in the concept of *petrosexoracial aesthetics* (that vital experience and way of life shaped by fossil energy capitalism, cis heteronormative sexogenic policies and colonial heritage) and *contemporary pharmacopornographic power* (those power structures that shape our identity and desire and that would act at the molecular level). The narratives would then operate from this perspective, as frameworks of intelligibility of life and would be produced and reproduced by all people in every conversation, in every gesture, in every practice, but they are virtually never created or invented by people. For example, in working with people who perpetrate abuse we understand, following White, Hall and Jenkins, that these people did not invent the binary identities that produce abusive violence, nor were they the creators of abusive practices, but that they would exercise them as a result of the training of patriarchy as a political system that promotes the ethics and practice of rape, lordship, and "ownership"² (Segato, 2020).

² This is a difficult translation. The concept in Spanish is "dueñamiento", could be also similar to "entitlement".

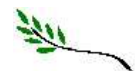
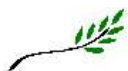




With all of the above, my intention is to produce an account that gives a very introductory description of what has been known as therapy and narrative therapy are political fictions. They do not exist as something in itself, but rather as a continuous, relational, contextual, changing, permanently in transition, and in a framework of power relations. The latter makes them practices susceptible to permanent processes of accountability, of revision in terms of never taking them for granted in their effects. And for me this process can only be congruent being done in a collective and contextual way. Unfortunately, these processes are sometimes confused (at the convenience of some organizations) with police practices of (literal) "surveillance" based on policies of imposition, normalization, punishment, marginalization, and invisibilization. To do so, they produce a hegemonic discourse of morality, that is, the imposition of a universal ethical truth. Unfortunately, this seems like a lousy joke, but it does exist. In Chile and Australia, for example, I have known institutions that, under a legal and abstract personality, proclaim themselves (in more or less explicit ways) as the upholders of morality. That is to say, they engage in academically supremacist practices, justifying themselves with the argument of coming from the counter-hegemony, but in the end replicating the hegemonic policies of production and imposition of knowledge/knowledges³.

Then, I think perhaps the only thing that could unify our understanding and call for open, responsible and supportive conversations about what we commonly call narrative therapy, could be, first of all, to join its founders' refusal to reify or try to define these practices in a fixed way. To refuse to turn them into an identity and an institution-sect. Perhaps this can be helped by the questions: How can we continuously build a practice whose form is given by the responsible convictions that underlie its proposal, and how can we build ethical (and not moral) verification devices of our practice, in the light of responsible convictions, with the voice of the people at the center of the conversations, those that show us what we are doing (and not doing) that is being useful and important to them? I mean those *responsible convictions* such as that *the person is never the problem; that people are always responsive; that life and identity are always a collective achievement; that relationships are always mutually contributive; that there is an absent but implicit in all expressions no matter what expression it is; that*

³ To translate this that in Spanish would be "conocimientos/saberes" we use the plural "knowledges" that Michael White introduce in his work.





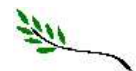
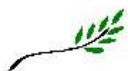
experience can be multi-historical; that people are experts in their lives; that stories are the frame of intelligibility of experience and have the status of being constitutive of life...and many others.

Trying to define what narrative therapy -or any practice that is an exercise of power- is dangerous if we do it from the logics of the dominant culture, and trying to describe what we do outside hegemony is not a simple, light task, nor is it devoid of an important burden of responsibility. Therefore, rather than answering the question "what is narrative therapy?", I am interested here in showing that what we do is always political, regardless of the names we give it.

Part Two: Pranas and a brief history of my approach to the narrative world

I wanted to tell you a little bit about my experience entering the narrative world, back in 2007, because of its powerful implications in what we have become as Pranas and our commitment to the way we do what we do.

That year a professor, María Amelia Barrera, from the university where Carolina and I were studying psychology, introduced us to narrative within the framework of a systemic therapy course. María Amelia was a very important person to me, she supported me in my professional practice in very complicated moments, for example, I lasted one day in my first practice because I denounced my boss for a series of actions she took to respond to a sexualized abuse of a four-year-old girl, my denunciation was not to remain silent in front of these actions that I considered with retraumatizing potential for the girl and blaming for the mother. Maria Amelia supported me while I feared for my end of career, for the judgment of professionalizing voices, and the confusion of discourses associated with silencing these events. I treasure these memories, as much as when a year before she came to the classroom with a bag full of papers cut from different texts with different systemic approaches. We had to take one at random and present to the class what we understood from what we had read. I put my hand in, and as in a raffle I drew, according to me, the biggest prize; an excerpt from the book *Playful Approaches to Serious Problems: Narrative Therapy with Children and their Families* by Freeman, Epston and Lobovits (2001), I remember that moment reading the following paragraph:





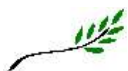
The problem is the problem, the person is not the problem" is a maxim often repeated in therapy. The linguistic practice of externalizing (White, 1989/1997, White and Epston, 1990b), which separates people from problems, is a fun way to motivate children to cope with and reduce difficulties.

In the family, the effect of guilt and shame in the face of a problem is often silence and immobility. In addition, when people think of a problem as an integral part of their character or the nature of their relationships, it is difficult for them to change, because it seems that the problem is very much "from home." When one has stopped saying that the problem is inherent to him or her, the child can establish a relationship with the externalized problem. This practice allows the person or a group of people to place themselves in a more effective and critical position, face to face with the problem. (p.29)

We went out with my partner to present to a crowded and unfocused class in which everyone was still preparing their own presentation. I consider this as my first narrative class. I was excited, moved. I did not understand why everyone was not as excited as I was. Soon, we met Carolina in this excitement and these were the first meetings of a Pranas still without a name.

This text resonated with me, it touched parts of my life that until that moment were expressed in a lot of pain, indignation, and feelings of powerlessness and immobility. I had an immediate sensation, despite the brevity of the text, of justice, of dignity. During 2023, in conversation with Rafael Dresdner, I realized that it had a lot to do with a uchronic story that actually had enormous potential in the fact of joining with Carolina in our project. This feeling was what I call a resonance of a subversive life aesthetic, one that has kept me alive, moving with purpose. It came to open doors to what I like to call *intimate activism*. But I will discuss all of this elsewhere.

After two years of hard studying, reading, practicing and hours of conversation, in 2009, through a virtual community that was nourished by a blog and translations

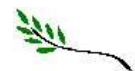
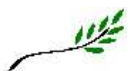




of articles, we began to connect with more people. Ana Maria Zlachevski, who was also a professor of systemic family therapy at the university, sponsored us and supported us with a love and commitment that I had trouble understanding in the first events of Pranas, when we invited people from Australia and elsewhere. Marcela Estrada, who contacted us through this blog and proposed us to meet in person, starting a nice collaboration and friendship... This was growing, the community, the links, the interest, until in 2010, we gave our first workshop with five participants. We received our first criticisms that made us improve the way of sharing knowledge and practices, and also the first comments that encouraged us to continue!

We were learning, thinking, our eyes were shining with each new idea, with each new practice, experiencing what I like to call the *resonance of vital subversive aesthetics*. In 2011, we participated in the International Congress in Salvador de Bahia, where I presented for the first time in front of more than a hundred people - trembling, with tachycardia, but also with a very big beautiful emotion - The Band of Life, a derivation of the workshops "... of Life" designed by Denborough and Ncube, which was in 2009 of the first face-to-face workshops we had the opportunity to attend. Before that with Shona Russell in 2008, both events organized by the University of Valparaiso, where we also met David Epston and marcela polanco in 2010. After my very brief presentation in Bahia, where I also proposed a mini protest that no one joined, David Epston approached me declaring that he loved my presentation: "I loved your presentation!", I very scared wanted to ask with a very poor English "Why!?", but before I could even articulate the language to speak, a fluent English speaker took him from behind and started asking him questions. I remember experiencing that communication paralysis due to lack of hegemonic language and being left with the eternal doubt... years later I told Eppy this story.

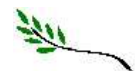
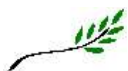
In 2011, I went to study in Adelaide, South Australia. There I had access to the archives of Michael White, where I submerged myself studying his therapy conversations and classes for various hour, I also had once the greatest deceptions with the "greats of narrative" who did not act in a way that was congruent with the ethics that I hope to find, which led to me taking the step of





renouncing to the one-year intensive course that I went to attend with much hope. This renunciation was no easy, for there was much confusion and grief, but clearly it was the best decision that I could have taken. I would be regretting it to this day if, to look good or to have access to places of power, I had stayed and betrayed my ethical foundations. I do not find it worthy to stay in places where, in exchange for access, they silence dissonance and protest with action that involves how to exert power with potential to harm. This goes beyond what Zimmerman named as narrative police.

In 2012, we studied an advanced course with Maggie Carey at what used to be called Adelaide Narrative Therapy Centre, which due to rights claimed by Cheryl White after the death of Michael White, they had to change their name to Narrative Practices Adelaide, despite the fact that White had decided to move away from the Dulwich and create another place with other people. Maggie, Shona and very soon Rob Hall, were something like our community of resistance, along with Peggy Sax, their ethic of care and their way of exercising power, which only enables beautiful things, were an antidote to the confusion and a continual encouragement to continue. We do our best to nurture these cherished relationships, as with David Epston, who has also embraced us from a place of solid congruence and - in my experience - poignant position-taking. In Chile, Eppy approached me once, in front of Tom Carlson and Carolina Letelier and declared: 'Ítalo, I know what you went through. I know it was tough. And you have my solidarity.' Imagine this... one of the authors who wrote that text that I read many years earlier was confirming that my feeling of justice, dignity, and hope was substantiated, this time it was real. This triggered a series of very important conversations for me. Previously, Maggie Carey dedicated hours to listening to me in Australia, a *listening with subversive respect* and political commitment that is hard for me to describe. Also, Peggy Sax, who from a territorially more distant place (since our communications were always via email), was close and supportive. Here I am not naming many other people who were my community at that time and who made everything that came after possible, of course Caro, with whom we have learned so much about life and companionship; and I, in particular, about care.





Well, I return to the story... At that time there were not many people who had knowledge of narrative outside of systemic therapy in Chile and together with Carolina we did not represent or resonate at all with this epistemic hijacking or at best great theoretical confusion that systemic family therapists expressed when teaching the "systemic-narrative therapy of White and Epston"⁴. For them it was just another "technique" among others in systemic therapy and externalization was the most, if not the only thing they knew. So we insisted on going to the grassroots, to know the history and participate in it, to teach as close as possible to how White and Epston were describing it and at the same time to translate as much as we could, not only the texts, but above all the practices, this is what has always interested us. How do the narrative practices look, sound, smell when we do them in our communities? What words, rhythms, cadences, silences are the ones that make sense here? When I say "here" I am referring to any local culture. There was something in the Latin American that, beyond Spanish itself, connected us. We were moved by the images that were ignited when listening to the versions of our territories and being able to collectively answer the questions that many people asked us about how difficult it was for them to translate the narrative, that "maybe this is only useful in English, because when I try to ask White's questions nobody understands me, they are very long, tangled, have a very sophisticated language, etc."

This has been a powerful and overflowing journey of beautiful links, some fleeting, others lasting, but without which it is very likely that narrative practices would not have had the development they have today in Latin America. I think it is important to mention this, because when they have published books on the history of narrative including Latin America, they have marginalized all the organizations that have had some dissent or conflict with the authors of these texts.

In disadvantages and advantages, we have developed our own way of doing things, in a self-managed way and with solidarity collaborations of people who

⁴ I would like to clarify that I am not referring here to the work of Ana María Zlachevski, who has always creatively and autonomously searched for and created forms of respectful therapeutic work and with whom we have had many nice conversations regarding this (and other) topics.



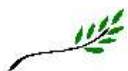


have nurtured and collaborated with us, including here Marcela Polanco, Vikki Reynolds, América Bracho, Tom Carlson, among others that I have already named. In addition to collaborations with the Colectivo de México (although only until 2015), Casa Tonalá (until today), Les Vies de Girona Spain, La Otra Historia de Tucumán, and Resonancias Prácticas Narrativas de Buenos Aires... and now lastly with Rafael Dresdner and his interesting contribution from the "uchronia". I am naming here only a few organizations, perhaps the ones with which we have worked more closely.

Part Three: Connecting over common interests, structuring safety and translating

This part of the article is inescapable if we are responding to our resonances of Jeff's article, as we have an obvious role in the narrative therapy training of a large number of people, many of whom now also teach. At Pranas, we have spent years looking critically at what we do, trying to challenge "orthodoxy" and therefore "policing" and all that goes with it. But at the same time, trying to be responsible with what we share. This responsibility is not in the service of a particular therapeutic model or school, but rather to respond to the broader political consciousness of what we do.

I will structure this last section into four parts: The first, what was at the foundation of Pranas and continues to be at the center: creating community. The second part involves a reflection on how do we connect over these common interests? And what I have come to call a *resonance of the subversive vital aesthetic*; the third revolves around some security considerations, how can we collectively build a context that ensures enough safety for everyone? And how do we respond to the fact that Carolina and I are in a position of advantage in relation to the students?; and finally, some comments in relation to what we understand by the *translation of ideas to the local context*: how could we structure the teaching of narrative therapy so that -instead of becoming orthodoxy- it becomes a territory of situated possibilities, sensitive to local politics?



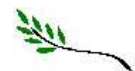


Connecting with each other: The resonance of subversive vital aesthetics.

People engage in learning processes for multiple reasons, among which we can usually find: to develop new skills and knowledge that can expand their possibilities of action at work; to improve their competitiveness in processes of applying for specific positions or to have greater benefits in their current job; to learn new orientations for work; among many others. But we have learned that those who are enthusiastic about these narrative ideas and practices, like us, often do not do it just for a mere professional and work-related issue, but because they find in narrative a *resonance* with what, following Preciado's concept of aesthetics (2022); I like to call *subversive vital aesthetics*, that feeling associated with something that will surely sound familiar to you: "when I read narrative therapy for the first time, I felt it was the same thing I was doing, but organized and put into words" or "is that just as you are explaining it to me, I feel I have been doing narrative therapy forever!". We know that this is not literal and that narrative practices are much more than just an inspiration or a feeling, as they have involved sophisticated work in their development, mainly by those who originated it all, David Epston and Michael White, but we also know that this feeling or resonance of vital aesthetics is very powerful, as it apparently links to experiences such as recognition and belonging from some place of disadvantage: that feeling of "having finally found a place to feel part of, where they don't tell me I'm crazy, that I'm hypersensitive or that I exaggerate in my social commitments"... it is a sense of belonging that can sometimes be related to inhabiting the forbidden, the counter-hegemonic, the subjugated, the subversive, the dignified.

By occupying these platforms of legitimacy in our teachings -such as the various classrooms, for example-, it has always seemed to us of the utmost relevance to be able to generate contexts in which this resonance of the vital subversive aesthetics, of recognition and belonging of those who trust in our work: is honored, enriched and collectivized. This has been a continuous, imperfect and precious work. So how do we honor the resonance of the vital subversive aesthetic?... Just what I did not experience in the International Diploma in Australia.

In addition to, of course, contributing to the development of knowledge and skills for work, honoring this sense of resonance involves much more than just sharing





"content". To respond to this, I want to start at the beginning by sharing basic, yet often taken for granted, ideas of what a teaching context would be for us.

And...what would it be to teach?

"No one educates anyone,

men (sic) educate each other with the mediation

of the world."

Paulo Freire

It seems that what one does is to learn in order to then share with others what one has learned, which will never be exactly what one learned, nor does the one who learns have objective access to what one tried to share. Teaching, then, involves a political responsibility, since it implies -or is constructed in contexts of- a power relationship in which processes of production of subjectivity are being set in motion.

It is not enough to have a more or less extensive knowledge, in addition to sufficient experience of what we want to teach, it is also necessary to make visible that what we share is not done as truth, but from our positioning and implies a process of choice regarding that knowledge; in turn, we have the responsibility to learn ways of sharing that open up possibilities of scaffolding, that make what we are sharing something accessible and "digestible". I bring this last point from the concept of "metabolizing the character", which the Chilean actor and theater director Alfredo Castro shares to teach his acting method. For me, learning would be like metabolizing: making one's own... and that requires time and a collaborative accompaniment that responds to the places from which each person begins their own process, in the complexity of a person's life, which includes the material and political aspects of their experience.

Structuring a space of enough safety

Once we have found each other, it's time to take it seriously. Translating some ideas and practices that we have learned with Vikki Reynolds, at every training start, we send an email with the subject "Safe enough space" with the intention of structuring a collective context of accountability in a concrete way for any





expression that we may have made, even if inadvertently, that has transgressed some preferred territory of the participants. When the courses are long, we spend several hours discussing care and safety and include it in the mailing (see annex)⁵; when the courses are very short, we share what we have learned in other groups and invite people to join in these considerations.

Thanks to this space, we have had challenging and precious conversations, embracing the idea that this is imperfect work (Reynolds, 2019) and that we can always invite ourselves to ethical places to be accountable for the effects of our exercise of power.

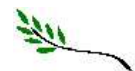
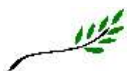
We understand that these contexts are power relations and that we have an advantageous position in relation to those who act as students, but as White stated, power is not something bad per se, it can also be an enabler, not only abusive, and that is how we understand it.

This invitation involves all the people who participate in the group and the conversations, making visible as much as possible the different places of advantage and disadvantage present in the relational experiences; it assumes that seeking contexts in which to feel safe transcends the classroom and is a collective project.

Contexts of teaching and "leveling the playing field" practices.

Designing and developing a course, whatever it may be, is for us to give shape to a context in which a series of direct or indirect conversations will take place, involving a selection, organization and a way of sharing certain knowledge in the hope that it will facilitate the learning process of the person taking the course. What results from this does not depend only on who designs this context, but also on at least three variables that we have been able to identify: 1) the level of interest, therefore of involvement, that the person has with the course proposal in terms of contents; 2) the sense that the particular design proposed and the way it is offered make to them; and 3) their real possibilities (material and political) of involvement.

⁵ We decided to share a copy of one of the emails we have sent as an input, in case you want to get ideas from it. It would also be nice to receive feedback to enrich the document.

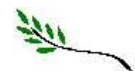
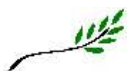




These are relevant dimensions that will impact each student's experience. I will now focus on the third. It is not only the hope that the person has in relation to the complexity that they want to embrace, but also their broader circumstances that enable (or not) the realization of that hope. For example, for those who perform caregiving tasks, this involvement is likely to be less, even though the effort may well be greater than for those who can devote a lot of time to the course and to rest. These people are overwhelmingly women. We try to respond to these disadvantages by structuring equity platforms, but though this never manages to guarantee equal access, it does manage to even out a little the unevenness of the advantage/disadvantage terrain. We believe that the responsibility of the teacher is to respond to the disadvantages so that they have as little impact as possible. We do not have a protocol, but we do have an ethic from which we derive practices for leveling the playing field, although it can never be completely leveled, since it also depends on factors beyond our influence. For example, on occasions when classes could be recorded, we have given greater access to those who, as a result of their caregiving duties, have had to be absent or have been present in a more intermittent or multitasking manner... One organizes a context with the purpose of facilitating learning (based on access policies, design, and scaffolding). However, whoever teaches cannot guarantee that people will learn what it was in their hope to learn, but only offer contexts that facilitate access as much as possible.

Contexts of teaching and "leveling the playing field" practices.

When we share our narrative experience with students, we base our work on what Carolina Letelier has expressed as "it is not only what we do, but how we do what we do", alluding to the congruence of practice; this would be asking the question of how can we teach non-marginalizing ways of exercising power by promoting contexts for respectful conversations with, for example, diverse gender identities, racialized people, including immigrants marginalized from the economy and other institutions, dissenters from the cis-heteronormative system, individuals identified as "lower class," and other minoritized identities or subjective experiences? And also in more everyday, but equally political matters, such as ensuring that in the coffee break there are options for everyone (vegans, lactose, or gluten intolerant, etc.), making things easier for those who are taking care of others, being willing to talk, laugh, listen, or, as enthusiastic as we are to



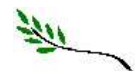


continue the conversations, to be mindful of the time of the people in charge of cleaning or the door of the facility, respecting their schedules and trying to collaborate as much as possible and in collective ways.

In the same spirit of congruence would be the issue of structuring contexts that leave out as much as possible the "normative evaluation of hard content". Although this is an ongoing conversation, our option has always been that all the contexts we generate should be for learning and, hopefully, collective. For this, the hegemonic processes of academic evaluation have not been necessary or required for us. We find more interesting the news of difference: what am I managing to do now that before the course I would not have been able to do and that is harmonious and in tune with the resonance of the vital subversive aesthetics that moved me to take this course? In particular, I am very critical of the evaluation processes, because in my experience, they were virtually always instances in which I did not generate learning, but fear, anxiety and anguish. I think that in many contexts, what the evaluation is trying to take care of is the design and content of a particular course, rather than the actual learning of people. In addition, I believe that these processes can have a potential effect in building orthodoxy based on police surveillance: leaving no room for the transformation of knowledge, that is, whoever says what the teacher wants to hear (or what he/she manages to understand from what he/she hears) gets a good grade. On many occasions this translates into scenes of humiliation, ridicule, and disqualification. I cannot count the number of colleagues who have come to therapy or supervision with me as a result of the abuse of power in undergraduate and graduate courses, not only in Chile.

With all this, I am not affirming that there are no instances associated with generative, decentralized, enabling, and enriching evaluation. I am not "canceling" all types of evaluation processes; in fact, I am aware that there are ethical and collaborative ones. I believe that generating verification devices that certify a certain level of learning is very necessary, since our practice will have an impact on the lives of the people who ask for our help, but I am certain that they do not have to be universalist, punishing, or humiliating.

Another aspect that I would like to briefly mention here in relation to congruence -and that in this case implies disobeying disciplinary mandates-, is the fact that we invite to our courses "people who work with people in contexts associated with



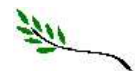
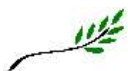


mental health and/or community work", we have never used as a criterion of discrimination the profession or trade of whoever is interested in what we teach. Despite having the professional title of "psychologists", we have never joined disciplinary power struggles and we support those who denounce their effects. This has tremendously enriched the conversations in the courses, with people linked to art, education, communication, literature, and social activism.

For us, congruence is also related to trying not to be mere reproducers of a model or to promote its mechanical technification. We strive to pay close attention to *responsible convictions* and their practical implications so that people find their own ways of constructing or representing them in their work. We understand learning therapy as a process of continuous "failure to copy", that is: in the attempt to copy our practice, or Epston's, or White's, people will fail and in that failure there will appear cracks of originality, of situated novelty that can be reauthored to invent unique ways of doing. Part of this idea I heard from Michael in some of his classes that I had brief access to from the archive they keep at the Dulwich Centre. I think many of these videos should be accessible to the entire narrative community. It seems to me that it is a heritage that should not be privatized... sorry, I went off topic, here is a quote from White related to this:

Training in narrative therapy is not about anything goes, at all! Is about developing practice skills (...) and what we invite them [students] to do is to clear a space to engage with these ideas, to explore these practices and to find ways in reproducing some of this ideas and practices in their own work, that's the number one understanding (...). The number two understanding is as they reproduce this ideas and practices there will be very unique expressions that didn't occurred to us and this provides a point of entry to very rich reauthoring conversations.

In conclusion, an important part of our teaching work is based on the questions: How can we teach an unorthodox, but responsible and accountable version of narrative therapy? How can we generate a context for critical conversations that challenge indoctrination? How can we do this while being congruent with our responsible convictions?





Open space for dissent of ideas and discussion.

It may sound obvious, but I consider it important to share here the invitation we always make in the trainings: the right to dissent in order to promote safe space and challenge orthodoxy, hegemony, and its policing. Especially in a context where we often seem to be all in agreement and moved by what we are sharing, if we do not leave space for dissent, we are not opening up possibilities for learning in difference. Now, it is worth asking ourselves what we consider dissent and how we differentiate it from attack. We understand *dissent* as the expression of outspoken disagreement about ideas and practices that question the dominant discourses of hate. On the other hand, we would understand attack as any defense of ideas that support hate speech. However, we understand that attacks can often be inadvertent actions and we do not subscribe to the culture of cancellation. For this, the idea of *irresistible invitations to responsibility* from the understanding that these are *parallel journeys* (Hall, 2018 (personal communication); Jenkins, 2009) becomes extremely useful and relevant to us. This helps us to challenge the binary of good/bad, ethical/antiethical and embrace the conviction that we are participating in a group of people trying to think and do things so that the dignity of other people's lives and our own is respected. In this sense, we assume that the dominant discourses pass us by and that we need to respond without becoming moral and ethical policemen. This is delicate and challenging when in the same room someone expresses a comment that may be overwhelming for another colleague/student, but our overall experience has been enriching, perhaps in another text we will tell stories about this. In the meantime, you can read the work of Vikki Reynolds, who has probably accompanied us the most on these solidarity routes.

Translation

We could think that Pranas is in fact a translation project. Here I would like to share just one dimension of this that involves teaching processes. We understand translation as an interpretative act. This text you are reading is written in Chilean Spanish, but will also be published in English. As you read the English version, new dimensions of what I have tried to share here will appear (and some Spanish ones will disappear). The same happens when one teaches. We share a translation, our interpretation of what we have been constructing as *terapia narrativa*, then the people who participate in our classes engage in their own processes of

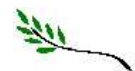




interpretation, based on the previous knowledge that is closest to them and that in their own judgment would be more relevant to what they are hearing. That is to say, they listen to what we share by putting it into the most accessible intelligibility frameworks for them. This is a process of translation. The more distinctions we make in the multiple repetitions we attempt in our classes, the more likely we are to find ourselves in common territory, even if it is never the same.

In this process we have encountered a series of challenges over time linked, for example, to the refusal to use Anglicisms (a common practice among Spanish speakers, sometimes due to laziness in translation, other times -probably more often- due to classism). Words have meaning and become concepts when they have a history, when they are loaded with images of what is known, when they evoke local experiences (Latorre-Gentoso, 2024). Anglicisms have none of that. We believe that to assume empty words is to assume coloniality and imperialism; it is to subjugate ourselves, to renounce our own histories and their infinite images. There are many examples, such as *mitin* (for “reunion”), *cofi breic* (for “descando”), *onlain* (for “en línea”) or *feic nius* (for “noticias falsas”). The praise for gringo images is deeply saddening. Plus, the increasingly assailing onslaught of academic degrees as validation of work coupled with the insistence on calling them “PhDs” instead of “doctorados” or “MSWs” instead of “maestría en trabajo social” and a long etcetera. I suspect this is done to achieve some classist social status. In other words, in ways that seem farthest removed from popular culture, in ways that can distance me as much as possible from the ordinary.

In the commitment to translation -which in any case we know is not reduced to using words in Spanish- a paradigmatic example for us has been to be able to translate the concept of *accountability*. In many Latin contexts, in fact, some speak of “*acontabiliti*”, but for us this option is meaningless. This concept in English can also be used as a verb and as an adjective, which is in fact how we have read it the most: *to be accountable*. This has presented us with a tremendous challenge, first because it is not used as an adjective in Spanish and when we have tried to translate it, it has been translated as “responsibility” (*responsabilidad*), which is clearly not the same thing, but it can be adjectivized. There is a text by White that was translated this way in fact. Over time, we have been gradually proposing the difficult translation of “*rendición de cuentas*”,





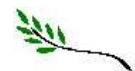
“*persona que rinde cuentas*” and “*contextos de rendición de cuentas*”. With surprise, we have noticed that many of the people we have trained on issues related to accountability are naming it that way and we are collectively building a concept with words closer to our ways of imagining life. This topic would be enough for an article in itself, but there are still some points I would like to share with you.

The maps are not protocols, they are invitations to exploration.

With Carolina we call White's maps of narrative practice: *counter methodologies for researching local knowledge*. Far from being protocols, recipes, or techniques, we understand the maps as Michael's effort to make accessible some routes of exploration or research with people for the purpose of enriching accounts of local knowledges and in the hope of opening spaces for the development of various kinds of re-authoring conversations. The maps have multiple starting points, and each has the intention and potential to *interfere* with some kind of social activity that may be, on the one hand, promoting poor and often disqualifying understandings of people's experience and, on the other hand, hindering the possibilities of multi-historicizing life with preferred narratives.

Several of these starting points, from our perspective, *interfere and interrupt* the course of social processes associated with policies of totalization of people's identity and their collapse with the problem(s) of their lives. Here, for example, externalizing conversations play a fundamental role: when people identify the problem as themselves and collapse their sense of individual and/or collective identity with the identity of the problem. But also, other maps interfere and interrupt processes associated with: when people dismiss actions or initiatives associated with a preferred territory of life for not having a framework of intelligibility that makes them meaningful, privileging those actions that fit with a behavior or a problematic dominant discourse that are more accessible to them to understand their experience; when people represent themselves as passive in the face of abuse experiences, leaving out of place any story whose form is given by how they responded, how it was possible to respond this way and in the service of what those responses were, etc.

Each map is supported by an ethic that we assume as a *responsible conviction*. This exceeds the categories of inquiry that scaffold the maps. For example, when





we converse with people, we do not always do externalizing conversations based on the *statement of position map 1*, but always our conversations stands at the externalizing ethic or responsible conviction that people are never the problem.

In this way we understand the maps as possible routes to reach the enrichment of preferred storylines, no matter where we start from.

When we say that they are counter-methodologies, we mean it. We strongly believe that the scaffolding of the maps designed by White could in fact be used as a methodology for social research that aims to contribute to the production of local knowledge, in masters, doctoral and postdoctoral programs. I believe that this is the most forceful conclusion that I have drawn from my brief time in the academy of doctorates.

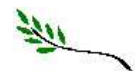
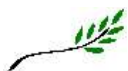
We know that these maps are a concern of many colleagues, including David Epston, as they are being protocolized in the United States. But what social initiative does not run the risk of being protocolized in the empire of protocolization in the service of neoliberalism and social control? Surely, we cannot stop these processes of neoliberal simplification, but we can disobey their requirements for our practice, engaging in complexity and rejecting what Epston has called the McDonaldization of narrative therapy.

Generate practice contexts.

Part of the translation process, perhaps one of the most important, is to make the work transparent and show how it is being seen. For this we always try to generate two types of practice contexts.

The first is to show. Both Epston and White have always accounted for the ideas they teach by making the practice transparent, with live sessions or videos of conversations. We have passed on this tradition and we have found that it is very useful for people to learn and for us to expose the complexity of the therapeutic task.

The second is the invitation to practice for those who are learning with us. We promote the development of skills through conversational exercises among them. But also, we promote participation in the construction of counter-documents and





resonances from the beginning of the training, even before we teach these topics...

It's time to end this long article. If you made it this far, thank you! I hope it has aroused curiosity, resonance, and dissent.

Important note at the end of this document

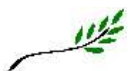
Everything I write in this article, especially the last part, makes me/us more dangerous. The more we talk about consent, trust, respect, and safety, the more careful we have to be, because it is in contexts like these that abuse happens the most, because they have the potential to confuse people, to make them think that they are wrong or that they imagined what made them feel bad: "how could Ítalo, who talks all day long about these things, have said this that made me feel bad, humiliated, transgressed, disqualified?" This is fundamental in our trainings, in therapy, in supervisions and in every practice we do standing on platforms of power.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Jeff Zimmerman for encouraging an unavoidable conversation and for doing it in a kind and critical way. Also, to Rafael Dresdner for his comments that made this text much closer to what it was intended to be and for the care, respect, and critical vision with which he expresses it.

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Annex

Hello,

This email is very important for us because it expresses the policies of Pranas (always under construction).

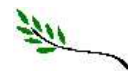
In collective training contexts, we are interested in taking care of the space of relationships during the course of the meetings. We assume this care as part of our responsibility, but we also understand it always as a collective project: "to take care of ourselves and to take care of the space between all of us".

This includes any action or expression that has the effect of discomfort, or transgression of any kind, of those in charge of the space (Italo and Caro in this case), or of any person who is participating.

While we understand that these actions may be inadvertent and unintentional, we are interested in responding to their real effects in ways that enable kind, respectful and caring coexistence for all.

Here, what they shared yesterday regarding care considerations:

- Respect, applied in pronouns, to the quality of presence, to be ready.





- Willingness to be able to speak what needs to be spoken, this can open up new dialogues and routes to diverse ways of being and being.
- Raise your hand to have order in participation.
- Care for confidentiality.
- Do not centralize speech.
- That the interventions are focused on the topics we are talking about.
- That the word can circulate and take care of the times, that it enables to enter into dialogue.
- Perhaps at the end or beginning of the meetings for questions, resonances, discomfort, whatever.
- Being able to close meetings on time.
- Being able to meet the needs of eating, etc....
- To be able to think a little when something makes a little noise to us, to be available to listen and be curious, not responding immediately. To be a little more curious.
- The possibility of sharing our actions and transmitting our feelings and ideas, that our opinions are respected through critical and non-passive dialogue.
- Do not generalize, taking for obvious, being able to visualize differences, nuances.
- It is important to have a vocabulary as neutral as possible for foreign colleagues, to be able to interrupt freely.
- Confidentiality as fundamental.
- Take care of the laughter, the sense of humor, take care of the fragilities in these delicate issues.
- Give notice before presenting any topic or story that involves sensitive issues so that each person is free to decide what he or she does or does not want to hear.
- To be able to speak with a heart tuned to HR, thinking of it as a minimum care agreement.
- Take care of our expressions by remembering that we have a camera in front of us.
- If something is left bouncing around, discomfort, pain, consider different formats to channel it.





- That all people feel that they have the possibility to express themselves and be heard and respected.
- That there be room for contradiction and dissent.

In case someone is in a situation of feeling transgressed in any way by us (Caro or Ítalo) or any other participant of the course, the means we have would be to make available the mail of Caro carolinaletelier@pranaschile.org or her wsp +56990885362, or Ítalo (italolatorre@pranaschile.org) or his WhatsApp +56984043923; or the mail of Pranas (this same one that we only see Carolina and Ítalo).

We share Vikki's video that can contribute a lot to this purpose:

<https://vimeo.com/310492336?share=copy>

See you and keep talking!

Warmly,

Ítalo Latorre-Gentoso and Carolina Letelier Astorga

