
Reflections on Reflecting Processes in a Swedish Prison

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During our work in the prison over sixteen years, many findings and inventions have been made, which gave us many levels of knowledge. This article is based on a presentation at the Houston Galveston International Summer Institute in June 2007 at Las Palapas, Mexico. The audience listened to a short presentation of our work at the Kalmar prison and decided which part of it they wished to know more about. In this paper their choices of areas of interest have been transformed into questions. These questions and my responses to them form the second part of the article. I begin with a description of the societal context of our work and conclude with a summary of discussions with the workshop participants after the workshop.

Social Conditions in the Swedish Society

The reflecting talks I present here took place in Sweden, a Western democratic and fairly well-to-do society, in which equality between men and women has long been established. Almost all women work. The Swedish society of today has developed after the Second World War on the ideas of social democracy and welfare

for all. Sweden has a social insurance system including every citizen with comprehensive health care and a Social Insurance Agency covering needs related to sickness and handicap. Health care is governed by the County Health Care Board, a popularly elected organization. It has two levels, the primary care at the health care centers or family doctors and the specialized care at hospitals. Children's and families' psychological health care is organized in Child and Youth Psychiatric clinics with both inpatient and outpatient care. The social welfare system is organized by the city council. Every citizen has the right to use the social welfare system as to protect children at risk, have admittance to treatment of addict problems or to get help with financial problems.

Another general benefit is the right of entry to all education without charge. It means that today almost every youth has an education level of high school and that 60 % of the Swedish youth study in universities or in advanced vocational training. Students can finance their university studies by the governmental credit system, which means that they are moving out from their families of origin after high school exams and can manage their life by themselves. Education has traditionally been an important issue for the Swedish working class. Historically, different educational associations offered education for their members, such as apprenticeships in crafts and later folk high-schools, a kind of residential school for young adults with the overall object to give general civic education. Over time, much of this education has been integrated in governmentally organized systems.

You could assume that this society, which offers its citizens such opportunities, cannot have any problems. But we do. (And some of the problems are visible in my work as you will see in the section below "The Prisoner".) It seems that the first level of a democratic society built on social democratic ideas needs to develop to a second level: how to change and reorganize the society when the citizens need changes. This second level needs to look at the adequacy of the care systems (do we need this kind of help or another kind?), the form of the organizations (from closed to open, from hierarchic to heterarchic). That level also

Abstract: *A co-operating work with reflecting talks was introduced at the prison in Kalmar, Sweden, in 1991. In the wake of these processes of reflections, many discoveries were made, which turned our thinking round about the psychological changes. I present some of our discoveries in this article. Professor Tom Andersen, psychiatrist from Norway, followed our work for sixteen years and this is written in gratitude of his engagement in this project.*

Key Words: *Prison Rehabilitation; Collaboration; Witness Practices; Prisoner-guard Relationships; Dialogues*

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needs a new way of thinking or philosophy such as the philosophy of feminism (a philosophy of what we mean with equality and ethnicity). We also need to reconsider our standpoint in environmental issues and thereby our lifestyle. We need to collaborate more in our professional work and we need to look at our professional differences as resources to learn more about the person and his or her unique situation.

The Prison

The Swedish Prison and Probation system is organized by the state. The prison of today is a place where one is placed after one has been convicted for some offence, which society decides as a crime. People placed in prison used to be the ones who went out of the roles and laws in society at large, the participation in culture and politics, and they still are. As in most societies, a person in prison is locked up and loses his or her freedom. The prison I will introduce to you is situated by the Baltic Sea in the south east of Sweden, in the middle of a little medieval town called Kalmar. The prison in Kalmar is considered high-security. It houses 63 inmates who committed serious crimes and who have received long sentences – up to 25 years, the longest in Swedish law. Despite its strong controls, this prison includes a school, wherein each inmate is offered the opportunity to study up to high school educational level. They may also attend workshops where they can do handicraft work and receive union regulated earnings. The prison also has a flat of two rooms with a bathroom and a kitchen, which the prisoners can use for their families when they visit.

The Prisoner

Most Swedish inmates have at some time been participants in the above mentioned welfare programs with their families such as the Child Psychiatric Clinics, the Social services and so on, apparently without reaching a good enough result. The reasons for this are not easy to know. At first glance – as we look back, together with them, at their experiences with these programs – we see a picture of a treatment system and services that did not fit their family life and social status. This is partly because the programs and services were in general developed by and for the middle class.

More than half of the prisoners are originally born in other countries than Sweden and almost all of these come from poor circumstances or from countries at war. Their family bonds seem to be stronger than what is true for the Swedish inmates. They have different beliefs, religions and cultural backgrounds which need to be inquired into and need to be talked about; it cannot be understood with our eyes and our usual thinking of peoples' conditions.

The Guards

The guards are employed by the state and are trained in on site programs for guards. They are organized by their union: their working hours and income are negotiated between the unions and the state, and the union is a strong part of any negotiation regarding the job. The guards used to be ordinary people, sometimes without a high school education, from the surrounding small villages around Kalmar. They used to work at the prison as an extra job to supplement the modest earnings from their other work. During my time at the prison (from 1991 and forward), a big change took place in recruiting the guards. The young guards who were employed went through a general education program organized by the government and today they have at least a high school education, but more often a university high school. The older ones retired.

The guards who had chosen to participate in our reflecting conversation also went through an education program in professional conversation. Today's guards usually have their job at the prison as their only employment, source of income and occupation. Their salaries are high enough to support their families. These changes in the guards' conditions have resulted in a higher level of interest in their work, and a higher and more committed level of engagement.

The Therapist

At the beginning of my work in the prison, I was asked to offer supervision to the guards and their overseers in their work with rehabilitation of the inmates. The personnel were used to having supervision one by one, when they were supposed to tell their stories about the inmates. Their expectations were to get some advice on how to talk to, or behave, towards the inmates, sometimes how to understand them as human beings when they were brooding over their crime. As a therapist with the ideas of the reflecting processes, I asked if I could organize the supervision as three-part conversations, between at least two of the personnel and me. I made this request in order to facilitate reflecting processes in conversations and, in my experience, this would expand the learning and the possibilities for their work. Soon, I asked if I could meet the personnel together with the inmates in their own conversation. I developed reflecting talks between three: an inmate, a rehabilitation personnel and the therapist. As a therapist, I am educated by the government psychotherapy training system which requires a university degree and completion of a postgraduate education program, which is strictly regulated by The National Board of Health and Welfare in numerous programs. We decide on our specialty in the postgraduate program and I chose family therapy and system theories. We can choose to be employed, or to work in a private practice; however, the Swedish insurance system does not cover treatments by therapists in private practice; therefore the prison had to buy my services.

Assignment

Three Parts Meet

Therapist and guards in this system have two inherited missions; one is the state's, which offers rehabilitation to the inmates in prison. Their goal is the prevention of crime. The other is the inmate's, who sometimes wants rehabilitation or at least wants to feel better, or wants to have better conditions and get leaves. We begin our work together with an agreement between the three: the inmate, the personnel and the therapist, about what our meetings will be about, what we can talk about and how. We have to decide in every contact beforehand what the ethic/moral frame would be, and what we all can agree on working with together and what would not be possible to bring into our shared room of conversation. This decision also includes what kind of tasks I as a responsible therapist can agree to. We decided that we must maintain confidentiality in these talks, even for the staff present in the talks. This was an important decision that was arrived at through many discussions when I first suggested the reflecting conversations program. We, the staff in conversation and me, decided that there must always be three persons in the talks: the staff who belongs to the prison organization, an outside therapist, and of course the inmate. The inmates decides the subject, what to talk about of each conversation. There might be some restrictions, however, as we would not accept things like glorifying violence or robbery. The inmate is asked to make his own decision about who he will invite to the talks, to choose among the guards. This question is unusual in prison, because of the fact that the inmates have lost their free will on entering the prison, they cannot make many choices. To be able to make this decision, they have to think over and decide which guard they would like to share their story with. To be able to choose among the guards, the prisoner has to make many decisions: how do I know who I would like to talk to, what kind of person can I trust, how do I know who I can trust? To help them in this choice, I ask them to listen to how the guards talk and think, and about what kind of talk they like to hear. Every moment of the preparations of the meetings between us was carefully considered many times with many people. Our roles have to be agreed on beforehand, and continuously during the time we work.

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Distinctions and Definitions

Reflecting Talks

First, I would like to say what I mean by reflecting talk. In reflecting talks, two or more persons have a conversation while the other(s) is in a listening position. At some point during the conversation, the speakers pause and the listeners talk. The listeners share the thoughts that emerged as the conversation took place. Important are the notions of “multiple perspectives” and “choice.” The initial speakers, who are now the listeners, have the opportunity to hear a multiplicity of ideas and to choose what to respond to, how, and when. The idea is that uninterrupted space for speaking and listening is important to the development of newness in thought and action.

Reflecting talks in the prison involved at least three people: the inmate, the guard involved with the inmate, and the therapist (who has knowledge of systemic thinking and of reflecting processes). In the beginning, when the talks were more unusual at the prison, others often thought that the three-part configuration was for security reasons or to have a witness for what was said and by whom. We chose the reflecting talk format, however, for its ability to help generate new perspectives and choice for the participants.

Reflective thinking thus allowed inmates to search for new descriptions of old actions and to generate alternative ways of acting.

In western societies, our use of language has become increasingly sophisticated. We need reflection as a way to be sure of what we are talking about, to be able to reach each other. When we are relating to another, it is important to use language to check our understanding. If we consider the various forms of language – talking, thinking, writing, singing, gesturing, eye movements, etc. – we can see that all uses of language are ultimately about communicating and relating with others and with ourselves. From this perspective, it is natural to value reflection and to hold the belief that reflection can become a capability in every person’s repertoire. Reflections gather three (conscious) acts together: to think, to feel and to act (Andersen, 1991, 1994, 2003). What we do in our reflecting talks is to awaken these capabilities, make space for them and keep them alive. We believe that reflecting becomes essential in our being and in our acts and feelings in relation to the Other.

In the prison system we found the reflecting talks to be central to rehabilitation work. Often, the inmates were occupied with reconsidering their lives and searching for qualities they wished to attain. It was not often, however, that the inmates had or made the time and space to focus on these reconsiderations. The reflecting talks created the time and space for inner reflection with themselves and outer reflection with others. Arranged as three-part conversations, the reflecting talks created space for inmates to explore different ways of thinking. Reflective thinking thus allowed inmates to search for new descriptions of old actions and to generate alternative ways of acting.

Not just the inmates, but all who were present influenced the talks and were influenced by them. The guards’ engagement in the conversations brought the surrounding system into the conversation. It also widened the talks from dialogues to trialogues. The space we created for differences in thinking benefited the guards as well as the inmates.

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Their involvement in the reflecting talks became the guards’ primary way of understanding the rehabilitation work with the inmates (Bateson, 1998).

Answerability

Reflecting talks help our thinking to be responsive and help our acts to become answerable. According to Bakhtin (1993), to reflect has at least two directions: in its sense and in its being. It unites the form of responsibility and answerability; so that every human would perform toward their trustworthiness and act confidently. These actions are always together with others, in relation to another, participating in actions with others, thinking participative with others.

In prison this would be an important subject to talk about: how to respond to another human being with consideration, how to be reliable to one's words and act as to be responsible for the other's answer. Listening to reflections awakes the inmates' own thoughts about their acting and thinking reciprocally and invites new ones. They reconsider their earlier thoughts about events and acts; they begin to reflect – a necessity for reconsideration and change.

We

Often collaborative therapists and reflecting conversations use the word “we.” In prison, this is troublesome because it has various meanings in that context. We need to examine each of these. The word “we” can reunite or it can separate; it can convey discrepancy or similarity. Therefore, it seems important to clarify what is meant by the word “we.” For example, how do we define the frame, the form, the mindset to those who are included in the “we.” We can talk about the meaning (the physical stance) and the sense (the feeling and the contextual stance) of the word.

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Sometimes, the word “we” divides us, in a sense, to create something new together, a better world to be in for both of us. At other times, the word “we” can mean that refer to our shared humanity, coexisting in this very moment. In this later sense, when “we” are together in conversation in the prison, it means that we are sharing the inmate's history and story and participating in the meanings they are creating. We are literally walking with them in their stories and histories in order to be engaged in them. Tom Andersen, who often participated in these talks, used to say afterwards: “I can feel their stories in my body.” And we were not surprised by this, because we know the talks are powerful. If we have the courage to be there, we will feel them. Hoffman (2007) calls it the “withness” practices. For Shotter (2006), it is the idea of thinking in dialogues which can become a “withness,” as opposed to monologues which we will see as “aboutness.” Tom Andersen said that the stories we are listening to as professionals have an effect on us as well as the clients (Andersen, 2003). So it is in this sense that we talk about the “we” which is all the participants in conversation.

That said, there is also a distinction between us as professionals and our clients, whether inmates or otherwise. This distinction reminds us that, even when we listen to our clients and follow them in their stories and histories, we cannot fully know another person, nor their acts and feelings. Our clients can give us pictures of their life stories by telling them to us, but it is still just a picture. Think about how you look at a painting and use your imagination as you look at it. The painting shows a still life with a piece of fresh bread, a bottle of fresh cold water, and salt in a little basin, situated on a table with a kitchen towel. Perhaps the picture gives you an idea about old-fashioned hospitality. You can imagine pouring the water, smelling the bread, biting into it. Although you can imagine each of these acts, you will not become less thirsty or hungry by that act of imagination. This is what we do when we listen to another person's story. We can follow it, be aware of the words and how the person looks while he is telling us his story. But we were not there when the story actually happened, and even if we had been, we would have seen it from another view.

As professionals, we need that distinction. We need to be able to pay attention to the people we talk to and we need to be able to meet them in their searching. We need that distinction in order to make room differences in thinking and acting which can be brought forward through the reflecting process. In the sense of “we” as professionals need this distinction or separation from the “we” of our clients” for our own well-being; we need to maintain our own perspective so that we can confirm how we want to go on and with what (Wagner, 2007a, b).

In one sense we cannot be “we” with the inmates of the simple reason of them being locked up and controlled by the guards. The inmates are judged and sentenced by a justice system, they are marked as guilty. We, the personnel and I, are not. We can leave the prison area whenever we want to, but the inmate cannot do the same. It is an unbalanced relationship, not an equal one. The inmate needs this distinction between us for different reasons. He will meet us in conversation, but he lives in a prison and he has to be able to return to the cell and to his prison life after our conversation. To be able to keep their sphere of integrity, the inmates have to make distinctions about whom they are we with, and when. Only then, they can search for how to shape identity and recognition.

If and when we talk about the act of crime, we, the professionals, have to structure the talks in a special way as to be able to not only repeat but to reconstruct the story of the crime (Penn, P. 1998 a). In this sense we, the professionals, are not we with the story or the history, or the storyteller; we are co- and recreating a new outcome of the act. It would not be of any use for anyone if we are “we” in this particular story. We would feel very uncomfortable to be in a situation which is violent and in which we do not prefer to participate in. The inmate would go back to his story and, recalling it, would be thrown into the same situation and way of acting, which would have an enclosing effect on him. This act would not help him to a new, not yet told history to grow.

“We” can also part ourselves into groups. In prison it is a common case that the inmates are in one area of the prison and the guards in another, and they never meet. In Kalmar they are using the same area, but even so the dividing between the two groups was very common in the language use and in attitude. During my introduction time, I understood many unwritten roles. If you were crossing them, your time inside the prison would be short. One of them was never to enter an inmate’s cell. Another was never to offer any assistance to anyone (in other words, do not give opportunities for the personnel to have ideas or fantasies of anything).

Some of the rules were created out of security reasons, some not. The culture at the prison was that we are two different kinds of people here; one is better than the other and some of the guards marked it daily. After a while, when I worked together with the guards in the three-part conversations, it happened that the ones who did not participate in them did not understand what was going on. Which side was I standing on – theirs or the inmates? They were confronting me with the question and insisted a straight answer of choice – either/or.

Our experiences tell us that prison is the place where every word and act has its own meaning and sense, and that this meaning and sense should be examined by us all the time. Meanings and senses could change by time and by the context in which they occurred.

Questions Posed by the Workshop Participants and My Responses

What do you begin with? Is participation in talks of free will?

Yes, they are of free will both for the inmates and for the staff. When we began our work, we invited those guards and inmates who were interested in talks; it was and continued to be a free decision for both parts. The guards who work with talks went through an education program in systemic theories and reflecting processes and they even became a priority group for higher wages.

Inmates arriving in Kalmar will always be informed about the reflecting talks by the contact man at the prison as a way of rehabilitation. Contact man means a guard who is helping inmates with their matters, contacts with authorities outside prison, with families, with lawyers. The guard’s information about the talks used to be positive, as something very special and a good thing to participate in. Sometimes, when inmates were arriving from a hard prison system, they stated that they could not accept the presence of a guard in the conversations, if they would choose to participate in talks. They were used to keeping a distance between themselves and the guards (which we can understand represent the outside society) and with this distance they could keep themselves at the margins and continue to look at us as adversaries. I use to ask them then, if they want to be known by the guards as human beings with families and life outside prison, as fathers, brothers and sons, or as numbers, as for instance a murderer, instead of being anticipated as human beings. It is, of course, an invitation to be one of us in the society and to make peace with others and with oneself. It is also an invitation to change the description of them, to re-describe. Further, it is an invitation to re-describe the relation between the polarities inside the prison, a challenge for every one of us. It makes a big difference to ask one of the guards to be a part of one’s system, a network of relating to people, instead of being the eternal enemy to fight against.

When the inmate has chosen his conversational partner, we begin our meetings with presenting ourselves as professionals and describe our way of talking, the importance of confidentiality in the conversations and examples of

other kind of meeting we can organize. In our meeting, I ask them questions like: “How come you are here at Kalmar prison and not with your loved family, at your work making a living for them?” To the younger prisoners I sometimes ask: “How come you are here at Kalmar prison and not at the university studying some of the subjects you are so fond of?”

What kind of education program do the personnel have?

The personnel have been trained in systemic theories and in reflecting conversation. At first, they complete a six month program in general psychology and then another six month program in system theories and reflecting processes. The program in systemic theories and reflecting processes was held by me. Some of them have even been participating in a training program in Stockholm for two years. All these programs are part time, so that they could continue their work and keep their income.

What about corruption among the staff?

I first asked “what do you mean by corruption?” so that I could better understand the question and how to respond. The workshop participants then told me that many of the American criminal justice systems are corrupt. They meant that the guards are sometimes are not so different from the inmates, they can be bought by the inmates or they can be paid for some unlawful service. The guards are poorly educated and their income is low. In this area, we can see the differences between our societies: the guards in Sweden are organized by their union, which means that their income is regulated and the education level has lately been dramatically raised. This means a lot for them in their hard work: to rehabilitate the men which the whole society of welfare earlier has failed.

Does this program have any effect on the staff?

Yes, it does. Once, during the “Returnee meeting,” Professor Tom Andersen was asking one of the guards if that was the case, and he said: “Yes. I have been very much affected by the talks I’m offering to the inmates together with other colleagues.” “How is this effect?” Tom asked, “Is it possible to describe it?” The guard thought for a while in silence and then he said, “It’s difficult to describe in what way, but it changed my life, my thinking. Especially the meetings and the talks with you, Tom ... and the education program with Judit meant a lot to me”. Another guard told us that it has had an effect on his personal life as well as on his professional life. He said that he thinks more before he begins to speak and that the relations within his family have become better. They also told us, and we even experienced it ourselves participating in these meetings, that the morning meetings at the prison with colleagues became structured and much clearer and that the use of language changed to be more polite and correct, not so condemning and rough.

I, myself, paid attention to the atmosphere at the prison. It became friendlier and much more professional, caring and working towards rehabilitation. I would describe it as a good professional work. Conflicts have been solved in a new, effective way, as the staffs use the dialogues in their meetings themselves. One of the effects of it was that the insecure feeling of what is going on inside the prison disappeared. There has been a generation shift among the personal staff by the years passing. The old ones have retired and new ones begin to work. There are many women and young men among them, all of them more interested in changes, how to work with meaningful assignments inside prison, such as rehabilitation. They wanted to understand the inmates and get to know them and their families. They are not interested in punishment, or oppression, and less focused on control, but more on relations. It made our work even easier to get on with.

What were the difficulties?

They were many. Harlene Anderson says that creating a space for generative community is of importance (Anderson, 2007b). Half of the staff did not want the program in 1991. They thought we were indulging the men in prison, and they wanted them to have a hard penalty. Tom Andersen said at that point, that it is of great importance to listen to the

complaining voices. Together with his colleague, Professor Georg Høyer from the University of Tromsø, Norway, and me, he met all the guards in two groups during one of his visits in Kalmar and let them talk about everything, even their suspiciousness. Tom Andersen visited the prison from the beginning and during the following 16 years until his death. He was skeptical about the work at the start, because it was going on inside a closed system with strong control and, as he said: “it may be a wonderful work, but it will challenge the whole society.” I did not believe him, thinking it is a very little piece of work going on in a small, sleepy town, so I went on.

At the time before my participation in the prison work, the therapist came into the prison and met the inmate as usual, individually in a closed room, without any participation from people in the surrounding context. Now, the therapy room opened up and I invited the guards in the conversations. They became participators in real rehabilitation work and in therapeutic processes. They were not used to this kind of co-operating work, but to divide themselves in two groups: the inmate and the guards. This policy of apartheid would make their position in relation-making easier; they could think in terms of us and them. We would mean that we are different (better) kinds of human beings, compared to those (worse), which are sentenced for a criminal act and serve their sentence at the prison. As said before, at the beginning, some of the staff wanted me to choose side; “either them, or us” they said, meaning, either you are on the inmate’s side or on ours, the guards’. My answer to this challenge was that I denied choosing between these two, as a therapist avoids taking sides between spouses in couple’s therapy. My role, as I said, would be not to choose side, but to bridge the two groups, the guards and the inmates, together. For me, it was in line with the question I was asking the inmates: “Who do you choose as your conversational partner among the staff?” They had a choice and I would have the choice not to choose side. The staff had their choice to participate or not. All those new choices meant a challenge for everybody. If we are accepting an either or posture, we will at the same time extend the exclusion of people. It would be a posture which will give us problems in the long run.

After some time, the staff people who were not working with the talks recognized that the inmates who were participating in the reflecting talks, were easier to get along with. They were better to negotiate with, they were following the rules more easily, they were less opposing towards them; the communication became better between the two groups. It made their daily work and their contacts with the prisoners easier and more relaxed, and they became less tired. The whole atmosphere at the prison turned to be friendlier, conversation was going on everywhere, even at the different departments outside the conversation room (Anderson, 2007b). It took, of course, many years of hard work, through educational programs, supervising, and especially through the co-operating work. The support from the leaders at the prison was invaluable. We had them with us all the way. They simply believed in the idea of conversations, the reflecting processes in talks, maybe because they saw the results of it. However, the problem was the Prison and Probation Administration Board, far away from Kalmar, where experts decided to buy Canadian and North American cognitive, evidence based programs, as they seemed to be evaluated.

In the US and Canada, those programs are performed by psychologists, not by guards co-operating with a therapist. They were expensive, but they gave the board a similar program to use in every prison and implicit a decision on a dominant language for working with rehabilitation of the inmates. The staff could just read the given questions and record answers. It seemed to be easier. For us it meant financially, that the money followed the cognitive programs and that we lost it. We could not have an extra employed guard as to replace the guard in conversation. Those changes meant a very hard and at times impossible pressure for the guards participating in talks. They could not be supported by a colleague; their usual tasks were still there to be done.

Our reflecting conversations are representing the essence of talking and relating: to tell, to reflect and to retell. Questionnaires generate untold stories; the narratives we all live by will be gone. Our organizing of the talks holds free flow in telling-thinking-listening-reflecting, without somebody interrupting or correcting. Conversation becomes a mutual act, rather than being a separate act of one listening and answering and another telling some fragment part of their life (Hoffman, 2007a; Hoffman, 2007b; and Shotter & Katz, 2007). It seems to be very important for the inmates (and for every human being) that somebody is listening to their stories, that they can share it with somebody. And even more important became the part of reflecting. Listening to reflections awakens the inmate’s own thoughts. This is

entirely new for the inmate: not to be asked to explain or to defend his thoughts, but to search for new and unique meanings. Listening to reflections, that are carefully chosen and tightly following the narrator's story, gives rise to a process of thinking his own thoughts. This opportunity awakens questions like; "What do I think, what do I believe, and what kind of person do I want to be?"

These processes of becoming a person with responsibility, of feeling, thinking and acting with responsibility, build up a new identity. Reflections are essential in the human ability of consideration, which is an important part of growing to be a thinking, asking, responsible person, in constant movement and constantly building up identity. Processes of this kind are delicate and complex. They demand our attentive and careful presence. We believe that we can initiate, create, and keep reflections alive through our process of conversation. Reflections are generative and enriching, they contribute to human wisdom. These processes cannot be replaced by a prefabricated questionnaire, of the kind that so many of the new programs contain. Instructions of change do not work at this stage, instructions do not invite questions and reconsideration, but to change through obedience. How could you get a sustainable and responsible identity of your own that way? As these programs most often are extracted and adapted mixtures of various underlying theories directed towards certain corrections of behavior and seen as desirable by somebody else, they are limited. Such programs might be a possible later complement, when both giver and receiver can handle them with responsibility.

How do you work with individuals?

We organize the meetings, as I said, as dialogues, in which one is talking to the inmate and one is listening. This structure of meeting is important to follow. When a therapist talks with an inmate, she sits on the opposite chair and they look at each other. Questions are asked out of what he is telling the therapist, not out of what the therapist thinks of the narrator's story. It is important not to be interrupted while one is talking; it is important for the narrator to have his own time to formulate and search for words, to be in the story he is telling at the moment. In this way, he has a good chance to give us a picture of the history and life circumstances that we are invited into. If a person is offered the ability and space to tell and formulate meanings, search for words and remember, the person is back in the place of the act he is telling about. Formulating his own story, he is shaping the ownership of his specific language. This process of "linguaging" would mean that he begins to form his integrity and recognition (Fraser, 2003). When he stops talking, we, the therapist and the guard, turn to each other and reflect on what we have just heard. It is important not to look at the narrator to do so would mean to disturb him with our eye contact. It has the same importance as not being interrupted in the storytelling. During the reflections, he has free admittance to his own thinking and this liberty makes him turn to himself and begin to think his own thoughts. Talking to and thinking about his own thoughts becomes a unique and very personal act. "When I am not occupied with answering you but just listening, my thoughts turn back to me, I am in charge to think my own thoughts and reflect on them, if they are good enough," as one of them said. "I can choose to listen and take in your reflections, or to ignore them. As I am listening and making choices, something awakes inside me. I don't know what it is ... what I shall call it, the Self...? Maybe it's my conscience. Actually, I don't have to defend myself or explain myself."

When I am teaching the philosophy of the reflecting processes to students at the University of Kalmar, I tend to say that this is the kind of reflections we offer our children when they are growing up in our families. They are listening to the parents' reflections about everything in life; as how to get the money to last, how to make decisions about holidays, traveling, about which job we shall choose, how to solve different problems and so on. In this way, the children will be introduced to a perspective of the grown-ups' life. It is our natural way of being (Anderson, 2007a). Some of the children do not get good enough or sufficient reflection at the time they are growing up, and we can try now to offer them the ones they ask for. We do not bring our reflections in from the outside. Our reflections are our responses to what we have just heard and seen. They are spontaneous, made out of our fantasies, as we are discussing with each other the story we have heard. The purpose is always to provide something for the listener, to add something to his story which we hope can be useful for him. Sometimes a reflection is in the form of a short story that we think about at the moment; sometimes they are resemblances or metaphors (Penn, 2000). Sometimes, the inmates respond to

our reflections at the time, sometimes they will think about them back in their cells. Sometimes, they respond to the reflections with a new story, maybe a more significant one for them than ours was. The next time we meet, we ask if they would like to say something about our last meeting or if they would like to listen to our thoughts about our last meeting. If we have been thinking or taking about the previous conversation, we will tell them. In a way, it is like continuing reflections.

How do you work with groups?

A group started spontaneously once, many years ago. One of the youngsters was occupied with some question that which was awakened in him, probably by the individual meeting. He was interested in how other youngsters thought about the same subject. We asked him to ask the others, if they would like to meet in a group to discuss his special question. He had to select the ones he trusted. To choose for oneself makes one work with preferences, to think over alternatives: who would be the best listener, who could give reflections? When he had made his selections, we had our first meeting to establish rules about confidentiality and the reflecting way of talking and so on. Once the group had discussed and agreed the rules, we began the meetings. The group leader, usually a member of staff, had the responsibility for the process which was built on the principle of reflecting talks. One of the men tells a story, the others listen and give their reflections about what they have heard. The men usually knew how the process works, because they were participating in individual reflecting meetings. This form of group meeting became a model for all the other groups we constructed. The initiative came from the inmates' interests and their questions, the need to meet others.

My experience is that groups organized in this way work very well. The members take responsibility, they listen, talk and reflect, and they are respectful. One can say that every moment of how we organize and carry out a meeting or a session is carefully worked through and tested. We support the inmates' own questions and concerns in every moment. We believe that as soon as we take over another person's thinking, searching and formulating meanings, as experts who interpret, clarify or explain, we block their own way of searching for new alternatives, new ways to go on in life. We block their development into independent individuals.

What about family meetings?

Yes, we had them as well. You may think that it is not possible to meet families inside the prison, but our leaders decided to welcome the families into the prison. They built a fully equipped flat containing two rooms and a kitchen for families visiting their husbands, sons, brothers, boyfriends or fathers. The inmates had to make a request to the leaders and ask for approval to meet their relatives. When they got the permission, they could spend a weekend with their loved ones in the flat. It is situated inside the prison garden. They could stay there for two to three days and spend time with each other, cook their own food, watch TV or hire films, and play with the children. The family (not the inmate) could leave the area, if they did not stand to be locked up for three days, and visit the town outside. The guards knocked at their door some times during the day to make sure everything was OK.

Before the families came to the flat, we would meet them: the inmate, the therapist, the leaders, the contact man and the whole family. We informed them about the security rules and had an informal talk with them in order to learn about the inmates' circumstances and his relationships outside prison. If they asked for more talks, we offered our help. It has happened that we have had ongoing family therapy inside the prison, when the family was living nearby. In other cases, the family visited the inmate from countries far away from Sweden. These families told me that it was a relief to meet us: to see what kind of people were around their son and also to see the physical environment where their son led his life. For the inmates, it was important to show us their family bonds, as to show that they have a network of people outside the prison, that they belong to the same society or humanity that we do (Tutu, 2000).

Do you have any documents on this work? Follow-up studies?

Professor Tom Andersen, who visited this project twice a year throughout all 16 years, designed a follow-up study, which I found very attractive and in line with the reflecting processes. It is not only a meeting to summarize the results, but also a meeting wherein decision makers meet the inmates and guards so as to get a feeling of what is going on in those processes we all participate in. His idea was that the meeting should move those people who make the decisions. (“They should feel in their body what is going on in the lives of the others,” as he used to say.) He may have hoped that this experience would even make them reconsider how they think about rehabilitation, how decisions should be taken and what would be the best decisions for the people who are depending on them. This meeting design was also meant to be a witness of how people are affected by the talks, and to give an insight in what is going on in the talks.

Andersen organized the meeting as if it were an orchestra with different instruments, which now would play a symphony. He made this orchestra of different instruments sound as a harmony of notes. The former inmates would sit in one corner of the big room, the staff in another, the decision-makers in the third, and students and guests behind. He took his stand in the middle, as to have eye contact with everybody. Before we met there in the conference room, we sent a letter to many former inmates and asked them to return for a moment to Kalmar – not to the prison, but to a conference hall. We even invited the people nearest to them. We sent a letter to the decision-makers, who could be members of the Swedish parliament, The Ministry of Justice, with The Minister of Justice, members of the Prison and Probation Administration Board, scientists from The Crime Preventions Council, politicians, and the leaders of the prison. Some of them came. When everybody had taken their seats, Tom started the meeting, saying: “This meeting is a meeting about research, and everybody in the meeting is invited to participate in discovering new knowledge.” Then he asked the group of decision-makers about their questions; what did they want to know about the reflecting talks in prison? The leaders were asked to talk to Tom, not to pose the questions to the former prisoners or their families. It was important to make these distinctions so as to make the reflecting processes work in the meeting.

When the questions were posed, and there could be many, the former inmates and their families could choose the questions they remembered well and answer them. Sometimes, they worried about what they should begin with, or not being able to remember every one of them. Tom used to say that the questions that moved people that were of greatest concern, that were the most interesting were the ones that should be answered. Sometimes, he helped the former inmate or his family to say more, to expand their answer. After the decision makers’ questions had been asked and answered, the staff asked their questions and the former prisoners answered. Their questions were about what was good in the conversations, if they missed anything, if anything was unfamiliar, or if they should change anything around the meetings. Further, they asked former inmates whether there were things from the conversations that had meaning or use to them now that they were outside of prison. Finally, guests and students could propose their questions and the former prisoners would answer.

During coffee breaks in the middle of the interviews, we often observed that people sat in mixed groups and talked to each other, as they then had come to know each other, in relaxed discussions. When the meeting was over, Tom would thank everybody and wish them a safe journey home – but nobody moved: nobody wanted to go. Once people had begun to talk to each other freely, it would take a while before they were ready to say goodbye and leave. We documented these meetings, by note taking and video recording. However, we have not had the economic means to do research or scientific reporting as part of our work through the years. Given the need for research in reflecting processes and the interchanges in conversation, not to have Tom Andersen with us any more is a deeply felt loss.

What are the innovations in this project?

The whole project was an innovation: to work with a model from family therapy at a prison – a closed system of institution and control. An even bigger innovation was to ask the staff to join the meetings. Although not therapists, they were indeed involved in the prison life of the men. Another was to offer our attention and to listen to the stories the men inside the prison system told us the ones nobody was prepared to listen to. The innovations were all those challenges in a system of strong control with conflicts on both sides, to find new ways to relate, communicate, and learn from each other.

We made discoveries about what we worked and what did not work: we learned that some of our therapeutic truths were not of use. We had to revise them and make place for new ones and we had to begin to work differently. At a prison, the story we listen to and follow can even end up in a story of killing another person. This fact placed me as the therapist in front of a difficult dilemma: can, or will I follow an individual into this story? Searching for the answer to this question, we had to examine our beliefs, truths and understandings, find them inadequate, and search for new ones. We had to replace the story of crime with another outcome; we had to reconstruct the story during the narrative process and the development of the history of crime. Before the act of crime, we created a new outcome together; the inmate and the therapist during the story-telling and later the guard together with the therapist during reflections. It became our way of working with the story of the crime (Wagner, 2007a; Penn, 1998a).

We faced many other challenges during these years and we had to examine what we mean with our use of words. What do we mean when we say that we work with rehabilitation of a sentenced person? What do we mean by the word forgiveness, the word reconsideration? What is the importance of our awareness and what is the effect of the language we use to describe people (Wittgenstein, 1995, 1998)? This work turned out to be a challenge indeed, as Tom Andersen said when I first presented it to him. He thought that it was such a big challenge for the world that nobody would allow us to succeed. As mentioned above, due to decisions on a national level, our work was replaced by the cognitive programs that were introduced in the other prisons. I now in retrospect think, he was right (Andersen, 1991, 1994, 2003, 2007).

What did you learn?

If you want to know more about what humanity and life is about, the prison seems to be a place to learn something about it. I learned a great deal about humility.

A Reflection after Writing this Article

I have told you a story about a long challenging effort we did together with the personnel at a prison in Sweden. The work was based on the reflecting processes. We did not have a plan beforehand which we followed, but we let the process tell us what the next step would be. We were open to the encounters that occurred during the time and we were often meeting around them, discussing how to conduct towards them. Those discussions were the searching source which was supervising us and leading us in new directions. My knowledge of the reflecting processes and their immanent powerful way of being with others, searching for a better future being has grown from those experiences. Writing about those experiences widens my understanding of the language games and the philosophic stance of being human. We do not have a program which can easily be printed out for others, but we can intermediate experiences in other frameworks. Others can take the essence of this work and create programs for their unique contexts. I am very grateful for the opportunity to go through this assignment together with the inmates, the guards and the two professors from Tromsø, Tom Andersen and Georg Høyer.

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