

Interactive Creativity in Research: Reflecting Afterwards

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Abstract

This article presents a reflection on a research project written in the context of a Master of Psychotherapy. The multiple voices or polyphony which it contains is analyzed and carefully threshed. A new understanding and experience of investigation is developed and shared through it.

Key Words: *polyphony, research, reflection, Kanankil*

This article presents a study entitled “¿Qué ha sucedido contigo desde que iniciaste en Kanankil? Conversaciones sobre la experiencia de estudiar en el Instituto Kanankil. Experiencias Kanankileñas” (What has happened to you since you started at Kanankil? Conversations about the experience of studying at Kanankil Institute: Kanankilean experiences”). It was written between April and July of 2014 for the purpose of fulfilling the thesis requirement for my Master’s Degree in Psychotherapy at the Kanankil Institute of Mérida, Yucatán, México. During the conversations maintained in this inquiry, I and three classmates all met four different times in either dyadic or group constellation to reflect on the question “¿what had happened to us since we started the degree at Kanankil?”

Because the research and writing processes involved in completing the thesis were challenging as well as a pleasantly interesting exercise, I thought it could be worthwhile to go back to this experience some months later, after having rested from academic life and the bureaucratic stress, to reflect on the many things the process taught me

I reviewed the thesis and talked with Dr. Molina (M.L. Molina, personal communication, 28th August 2014), my principal advisor, in order to process the experience of writing the thesis. I asked her which aspect of the study would be interesting to write an article about. Among different options, she thought that it could be interesting to analyze the polyphony or multivocality (Bakhtin, 2012) that the document presents: by this term Bakhtin means the many and different voices which are present in every single moment or conversation. Related to this study, Dr. Molina was making reference all the voices, from the theory and the participants, which were present while going through the process of inquiry; voices that cohabited that process, brought forth and made public (Anderson, 1997). In a similar response to the document, my colleague Cynthia Sosa (C. Sosa, personal communication, 20th August 2014) commented after hearing the defense of the thesis and having read it completely, that she was surprised by the multitude of conversations presented in the final document. This made me think that I had to omit some more, for practical reasons...

Regarding polyphony, I think it could be difficult to speak about it without first mentioning the voices that are participating while writing these lines: one of them could be the voice of the exigency, probably self-imposed, since no one but me is highly interested in writing a text that is both worth the trouble of reading, and at the same time, receives the approval of a specific community of people, giving it a certain socially consensual value.

The voice of the people that will judge this paper could be another voice. The uncertainty of the process as a voice is also there, which according to Harlene Anderson (1997) could be a good signal. Finally, I think that one of the most important voices in this moment is that of the Thesis itself, which I strive to treat as its own entity, with a first name and surname, therefore I capitalize Thesis.

This Thesis was co-created by all the people that participated in it with their ideas, comments and reflections. Probably, this voice, the voice of the thesis itself, should get more attention while deciding the course of this article. I would not like to write something about “somebody” without his or her permission. This brings me to ask “What would the Thesis like me to mention about the multiple voices that cohabit it?”

It would probably go back to the first attempts to capture and present my conversations with the principal co-investigators, my three classmates in Kanankil Institute. During these attempts, I worked hard to make the voices of the books and theoretical readings talk with those of the co-investigators. However, I had certainly misunderstood what Cynthia Sosa (2013) and Janice De Fehr (2008) had done in their theses, which were assigned readings in our research course during the third semester of studies.

My colleague Cynthia (Sosa, 2014) and I talked about it later, during one of our last breakfast meetings in my home: she told the story of her grandmother, of the women in her family, weaving their voices, one into the other, the voices of the co-investigators in her work. The story of her grandmother is told by them. Regarding my thesis, the transformation during the educational and collaborative process in Kanankil, the voices should maybe have told the story of such a transformation. Instead of that, in what I am calling the “misunderstanding” of what Cynthia and Janice had done, I have woven the voices of my classmates I spoke with to tell the story of our conversations about the transformation while studying at Kanankil, not the story of the transformation itself.

I do not know what would have happened if Cynthia and I had met during my first attempts to write. The Thesis would say that one intelligent thing I did in that moment, the moment of these first attempts, was to share the “incorrect” document with a wide community whose judgment and reflection could enrich the process: the rest of the classmates with whom the co-investigators and I studied. After sharing, I waited patiently, trying to trust the process and to rest a bit so as to be able to start with the work again after a period of time with renewed power and perspective.

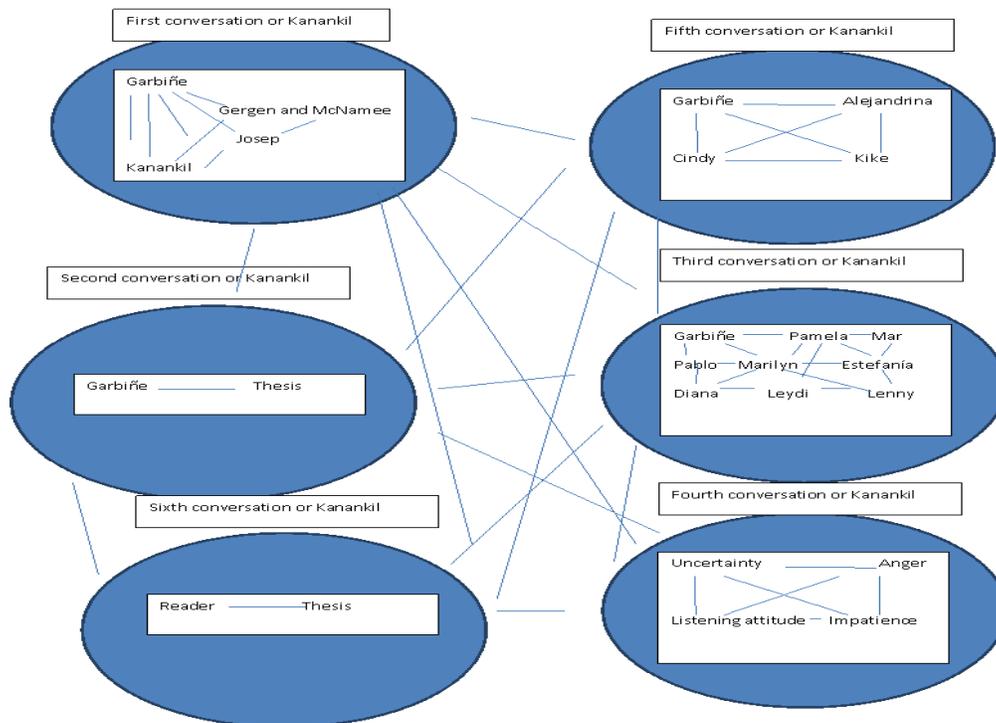
I think that the eight answers I received from classmates, (and the familiar, close and well-known tones in which they were written) helped me to set the closest voices in the center of the writing process; the ones that were present at all times and in daily communication. This explains the many references to personal communications that can be found in the thesis.

All these voices came into the writing flow nearly without filter, in the same way they usually are when I reflect. In the writing, I grant them the main role and let them construct “the story”, in this case, of the thesis. Often various authors (Andersen, 1991; Anderson and Gehart, 2007; Bakhtin, 2012; Bateson, 1979) would reinforce, contradict, share a quite different view or just wonder about what was being said by one or more voices in the document. In this way, they found also a place in Thesis.

Something similar happened, for example, when Dr. Molina’s idea (M.L. Molina, personal communication, 16th May 2014), that everything in the thesis should be dialogue, fixed magically or poetically (Shotter and Katz, 1996) in the process. With the idea of social poetics the authors mean, as I understand it, the process in which something new and meaningful is relationally built.

I can’t remember if it was after writing one or two chapters, which I would face each one at a time, with the tools (mostly voices) I had, as I have already said. Dr. Molina’s reflection or suggestion invited me to write the rest of the document in a conversational way, as if they were parts of a playbill or theater libretto. The voices of the people participating in this study would emerge in the way I remembered them or that I had them transcribed. As the narrator or seamstress, I had to spin all of these ideas in a coherent way to create a new meaning with them all together.

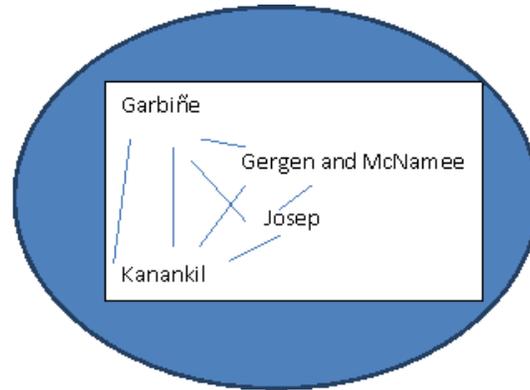
Once Dr. Chaveste (R. Chaveste, personal communication, 11th August 2014) used the word “rhizome” (Kinman, 2006) to describe this thesis. She meant that the conversations that were in the document were interrelated in the form of a rhizome. My great friend and boss in México, Nancy (N. Walker, personal communication, 11th August 2014) thought that the description I presented during the defense to explain the structure of thesis showed the networks I had built during my time in Mérida. She was making reference to the picture I introduce here, the same one that Cynthia (2014) proposed that I include in the thesis, for a better understanding of the process I had been through.



In what follows this picture will be explained more in detail:

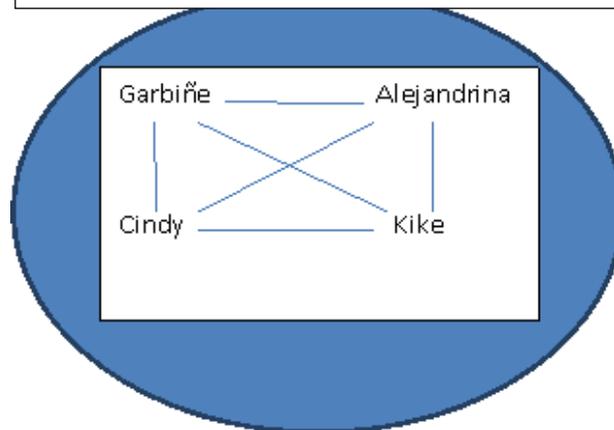
- The circles represent different chapters, conversations or Kanankils (which means “in conversation” in Mayan language) that compose the thesis. The lines connect these conversations.

First conversation or Kanankil

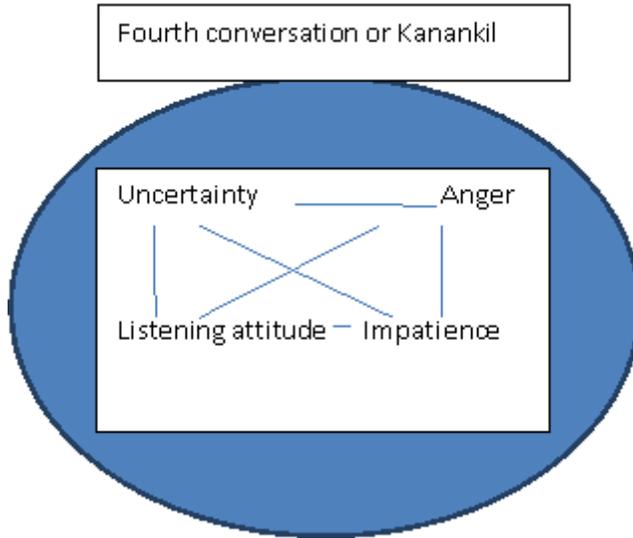


- The first chapter of the thesis explains how it emerged. For this, the story goes back to the moment I first came in contact with social constructionist ideas (through McNamee and Gergen’s book, *Therapy as Social Construction*, 1996). The reading made me want to know more about this philosophy and I felt it invited me to contact people that were working from its perspective, for example, a Spanish social psychologist, Josep Seguí, who spoke to me about Kanankil early on. Of course, the people working in Kanankil and Josep already knew the book mentioned here and they also knew each other. The chapter also explains how, through different meetings and conversations with colleagues, I finally decided to do research on the transformation I made during the process of studying in Kanankil.

Fifth conversation or Kanankil

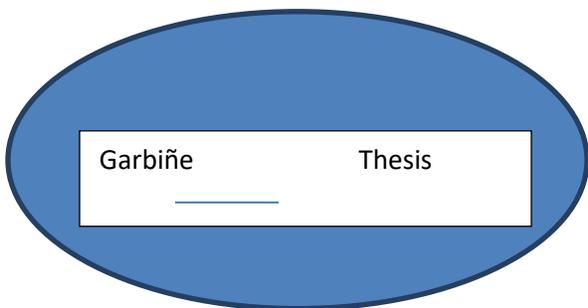


- To do this, I invited three classmates, Alejandrina (Ale), Kike and Cindy to get involved in some conversations about the topic, which are presented in the fifth chapter. This chapter was many times written in the “wrong” way, and that generated sentiments like those that talk to each other in the fourth chapter.

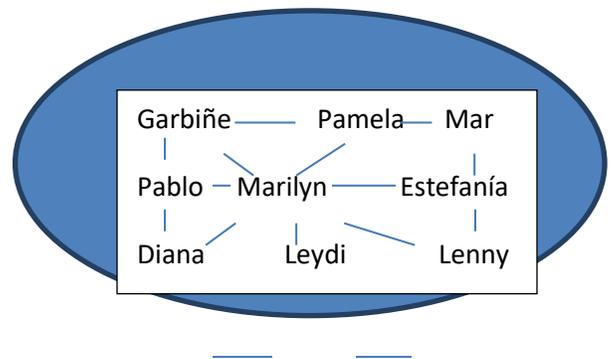


- At the same time, the frustration I experienced in attempting to present the richness of the conversations maintained with Ale, Kike and Cindy, helped me decide to send the material to a broader community, so I sent it to the rest of classmates for their reflections. Eight of them responded to my invitation to write their reflections on my text. Their voices are included in the third chapter of Thesis.

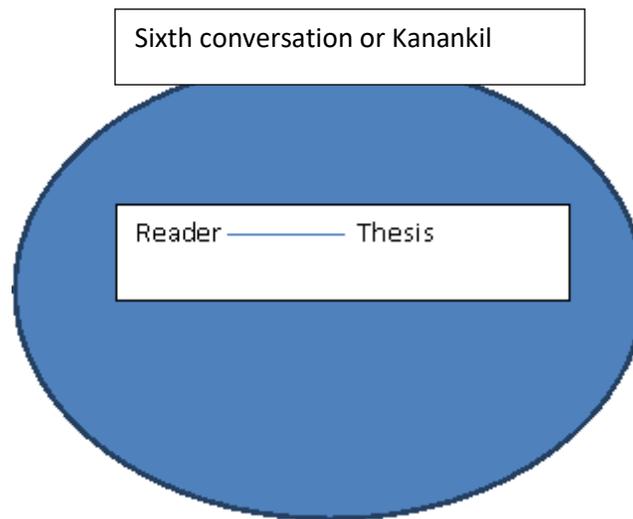
Second conversation or Kanankil



Third conversation or Kanankil



- To explain the structure of the document, the thesis and I speak about the process in the second conversation.



- Finally, in the sixth chapter I turn to the reader and invite him or her to participate in the construction of the thesis by using the white backsides of the pages to write comments and reflections. In that way the document can include new voices and it does not become “dead” writing: a text that is completely finished.

The idea of the creation or construction makes me think about something that was very pleasant for me, I don't know if the thesis would agree: the creative process that can be made into an inquiry, if one feels free to let flow freely all of the voices that cohabit them at any given time. I am now tempted to think that this reflection could be set in relationship to the work of Jaakko Seikkula and his colleagues (2001) when they promote and allow a person living through a psychotic break to explain what their voices are telling them. Coincidentally, Jaime Goyri (J. Goyri, personal communication, 11th August 2014), one of the synods during the thesis defense and Alejandrina Tzec (A. Tzec, personal communication, 1st July 2014) one of the co-investigators, mentioned the word “schizophrenia” after reading the document. I think that they all use it without the negative weight it could have in a traditional world of positivist psychology of assistance.

Even though I was in an academic context, I think about how liberating it was, to have permission to express what I had to share as an investigator, and how nice it was for me to do so in a nearly artistic way. This was perhaps one of the biggest transformations I experienced through the thesis process: to re-define the investigative process as something that can be gratifying, challenging, satisfactory, exciting and very-very creative

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