

## CONCLUSIONS

There are myriad questions to be raised about the Imagine Chicago initiative and the potential for a pragmatic social construction of future worlds where relational responsiveness and responsibility guide human action and destiny. Imagine Chicago suggests that when intergenerational inquiry and dialogue succeed in bringing forward the best of what has been and is, it simultaneously sparks a collective anticipation of an equally vital and meaningful future. Intergenerational conversations provide opportunities for a community's values and best practices to be shared and passed on. Elders are honored and renewed and members of the younger generation are inspired and moved to serve the creation of a positive future. The positive power of intergenerational inquiry and storytelling has become a lost art for much of the modern world. As follow-up to the splendid success and learnings of Imagine Chicago, we must ask ourselves two questions: How might we restore the power of intergenerational storytelling in our communities and organizations? And in addition, how might we pragmatically and consciously, through the selection of appreciative topics for inquiry, use intergenerational inquiry and dialogue to further the well-being of communities, families, and organizations around the world?

The story of Imagine Chicago suggests a need for the further development of a language of positive potential and for conversational techniques that invite a better future into being. It suggests that one approach to community-based relational responsibility includes the social construction of inquiry based on a language of positive potential. It asks us to study and to create relational resources to shift the language frame of our institutions, including education, health care, government, and business from the currently dominate discourse of human deficit toward a discourse of positive potential.

The extraordinary power of inquiry and dialogue to transform personal and community realities emerges from the story of Imagine Chicago. Imagine Chicago has been liberating and generative. In providing new images, it created new avenues for action and new hope for a better city. For some, the process was disconcerting, creating a confusion of personal priorities and an invitation to speak, act, and live in a new city changed only by conversations with a previously unknown Other. Flowing from these many examples of personal and community transformation, we must ask ourselves, How as educators, consultants, and social change agents do we really make a difference? Might it be, as Bliss Browne (1996) professed, that helping others to create positive images and discourse on a collective basis is the most important activity that we can engage in to create a relational responsible and humanly significant future?

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### Collaborative Learning Communities

Harlene Anderson

I agree with McNamee and Gergen's rationale and contrast of the implications and limits of individual responsibility and the potentials and constraints of relational responsibility. They suggest that from a social-construction perspective, responsibility is relational; it cannot be anything else. One person does not make another person relationally responsible. It occurs through and in interactions between people. I also agree that "relationally responsible inquiry has transformative potential for the participants" (p. 27, this volume) involved in any joint endeavor. As I read their words, my thoughts continually shift between the premises and the practices. My interest hovers around the question, How can I position myself with, think about, act with, and talk with others in a way that puts relational responsibility into action?

As a clinician, teacher, and consultant, I have found that relational responsibility or what I think of as shared responsibility (accountability and consequence) is inherent in collaborative relationships and processes, the essence of which is dialogue (Anderson, 1997). By dialogue, I mean a dynamic generative kind of conversation in which there is room for all voices, in which each person is wholly present, and in which there is a two-way exchange and crisscrossing of ideas, thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Likewise, learning and the development of knowledge is a dynamic generative process.

Transformation occurs in and through dialogue, and intrinsically, relationships transform. I am reminded of two questions that a colleague, Glen Boyd, (1996) posed: "What if the kinds of conversations we have are the kinds of

relationships we have?" and "What if coming together in conversation creates something larger than both of us?" (p. 6)?

In my capacities as a teacher, therapist, and consultant I want to invite and engage the people I work with into a dialogic space and process. Here, I focus on those aspects relevant to the discussion of relational responsibility. I will illustrate how, as a teacher, seminar leader, or supervisor, I create collaborative learning communities in which joint responsibility is invited and emerges. This involves creating learning spaces and processes in which people can connect with each other, in which there is a collaborative atmosphere, and in which people can be involved in constructing knowledge.

Because I value the concept of relational responsibility, I want to invite others to experience it in action. I believe that to invite another person into this kind of process, I must first act relationally responsible. This requires that I position myself in a particular way that demonstrates and encourages relational responsibility. I take a collaborative position. Toward this aim, I enter each learning situation maintaining an awareness throughout that cultural and organizational discourses bestow authority on teachers, placing us in hierarchical and dualistic positions. I hold the personal freedom, however, to choose how to accept and exercise that authority.

I keep in mind that the purpose of the joint circumstance and the expectations of how I will accomplish that purpose is influenced by at least three investors: the institution, the learner, and me. Each is embedded within other relationships and expectations—licensing boards, professional associations, credentialing agencies, professional settings. Each brings preformed assumptions about the learning purpose and how it will be accomplished.

Setting the stage for and sustaining collaboration commences with the first contact, usually face to face in the classroom. I have found that being open about myself and inviting others to do the same is an important first step. I begin, therefore, any course of learning by introducing myself, previewing my agenda for the course, and summarizing information and assumptions of my understanding as to why I was invited to teach and why I accepted the invitation. I am open that I am influenced by my imagined assumptions about the educational institution's purposes, by my past professional and personal experiences, and by the prejudices that I hold. These influence what I think others expect me to offer, what I think I can offer, and how I can best share that.

I want to create and facilitate a learning environment and process where participants can access, elaborate on, and produce their own unique competencies. I want each person to generate his or her individual seeds of newness and to cultivate them in the personal and professional lives that take place outside

the organized learning context. I want to invite and encourage participants to take responsibility for and to be the architects of their own learning. To these ends, I want to ensure that each participant has a voice, contributes, questions, explores, is uncertain, and experiments.

To further set the stage, I might ask participants to form small conversational clusters or to talk in pairs, depending on the size of the group, to address such questions and to discuss with each other their reasons for enrolling in the course—their learning agendas, expectations, and questions or dilemmas that they want addressed. I tell them that I have many ideas and experiences to share and have access to other resources but that I do not want unilaterally to make the selection for them. Instead, I need their input as to what they want me to select out. To help me, I need to know about them, the learners: Why are they here? What are their expectations of the course and of me? What are their individual learning agendas? What are their preferred forms of learning? How do they learn? I might also ask them, "What do each of you think is the most important thing for me and the others to know about you and your everyday contexts that would help us best meet your learning agenda and match your learning style?" Each group is given a large pad on which to record the generated material, a small pragmatic action that enhances engagement.

We reconvene. As each conversational cluster recounts their talking, I ask questions to clarify or to make sure that I understand, which often expands and adds agenda items. I record the material on a large pad for all to see. At the next meeting, I distribute copies of the beginning agenda to the participants. Each meeting thereafter begins with a checking-in to see what new items we should add to our agenda and what old ones are still hanging.

Inviting and providing opportunities for all voices continues throughout a course of learning. In addition to frequently forming conversational clusters, I give students a reflection sheet at the end of each meeting, asking them to share their internal words and thoughts with me. Sometimes, I ask for general reflections. Sometimes, I pose a question such as, Do you think that you are learning anything new, and if so, or not, how do you know? What are you learning about yourself and how you learn? Are your original expectations being met, and if so, how? Do you have new expectations? Or, We have two meetings left. Please let me know what you think we should address in these meetings. Although I have to create each reflection sheet ahead of time, questions or issues to address come from the content and process of the particular course, group, and our relationship and workings together. Learners bring the reflections with them to the next meeting, signed or unsigned. I read them and take them seriously. I also share my reflections on our last meeting.

The reflection process furthers several interrelated purposes. It consistently builds in continuous self, other, course, and teacher evaluation. I can learn more about the participants and their needs. In response, I may emphasize or de-emphasize course content or expand or fine-tune the agenda. It gives me an opportunity to improve my teaching methods and to adjust my style to serve their individual and combined needs. Through their initial lead and continual reflection, I accommodate to what each group, occasion, circumstance, and relationship calls for. Through a weaving of voices—theirs, mine, and ours—we create and immerse ourselves in a process of development and transformation of knowledge.

The process encourages learners to be active in their learning and to determine its direction. It makes learning more purposeful and self-directed. It provides opportunities for learners to think about, to expand, to reconsider, to question, and to understand differently. It promotes an opportunity to develop an awareness of and to develop habits of focusing on, thinking about, and tracking their learning and professional growth.

Learners report multiple effects of the conversational cluster and reflection processes. They report feeling safe to share. They report that they develop a trust in the other person's capacity for self-agency and an inherent trust in the process and relationship. They report becoming aware of the richness of their own internal conversation, their self-dialogue. They report that their reflections trigger a self-reflective process that translates and continues beyond the formal learning arena to their unique everyday settings.

Learning from this perspective is not standardized. As it becomes collaborative and participatory, it also becomes individualized and self-directed. Students begin to experience, recognize, and value their expertise, competencies, and talents. They become more thoughtful and active in delineating what they want to learn, in determining how they best learn, and in requesting a teacher's and fellow students' participation in their learning. They develop a sense of confidence as their voice is invited in, as they realize their own multiple inner voices. They develop an appreciation of the richness and possibilities that come from difference as they move from a need for consensus to an openness to uncertain and yet-to-emerge possibilities.

In their reflections, learners consistently comment on their individual learning styles, my teaching style, and the group process. They report amazement at the richness of the small-cluster conversations. They are aware of the generativity of the conversations, including the emergence of new learning—the way their own thinking changes and the way they interact with what they are listening to and hearing. They express appreciation for the opportunity, although an unta-

miliar and challenging one, to think about how they learn and what they want to learn. They express excitement that builds with feelings of having and expressing their voice and being listened to and heard by me and their peers. They express pride of ownership in the course and their learning, feeling accountable for their own learning and feeling responsibility to each other. The following words are drawn from student reflections:

I sensed a part of myself growing and emerging—a self that I knew was within but rarely allowed others to see.

The atmosphere beckoned to me, "Take a chance."

Wow! Today was really exciting for me to feel free enough to actually participate in conversations about questions and ideas that I've only really discussed with myself. . . . Unfortunately, not all places of learning start at the point where the students are. . . . I remember feeling a shift in my self as a result of talking.

I'm beginning to recognize now how my potential for learning is enhanced through the process of shared inquiry. As I'm writing this, I am becoming aware that I have always known this about myself and have held myself back with the idea that, "No one wants to do this with me."

I am shy and quiet, and actually a bit nervous, so I tend not to talk in class. . . . The small groups and reflections process have helped me get more comfortable, and I am able to more freely give my thoughts and ideas without having to be asked.

Some of the silence which often follows your invitations for comments and feedback is because we, as students, are not used to such openness for freedom of the type of conversations that you allow.

As usual, I'm always humbled by the minds of others. . . . The consultation on my case helped me reflect on my own inner dialogue and also free myself from a very stuck position. . . . I don't think the class knows how important their feedback and conversations are for me.

I am intrigued by how asking questions to learn more about and clarify leads to—could lead me to a change in my perception of the case and how relieved I am by that (referring to the previously mentioned consultation process).

In my mind's eye, what these learners say support McNamee and Gergen's notion that as one positions oneself differently with an other—as I position myself differently with learners—I no longer hold sole responsibility for their learning; it is shared. When responsibility is shared, the relationship is more mutually rewarding.

As I reflect on McNamee and Gergen's words, I am aware of the incongruence and awkwardness I experience in trying to explicate a belief in the inheritance of something such as relational responsibility and then trying to create situations and processes in which it can be accessed and enhanced. As I reflect

on my own biases and experiences, I am left with these questions: How can these ideas be communicated, and in what language, to an everyday ordinary citizen? How can they be relevant, for instance, to a Spanish-speaking immigrant mother involved in the legal and child welfare systems and who is accused of child abuse? In other words, the important question that I believe needs to be addressed is, How can the concept and practice of relational responsibility move from the academic discourse to everyday ordinary life?

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### Relational Moves and Generative Dances

Ian Burkitt

The present move to a relational notion of selves is one that is most welcome in the social sciences. As Sheila McNamee and Kenneth Gergen so rightly point out, the whole idea of responsibility and justice in the West is based on the assumption of the isolated, rational actor whose agency is entirely a subjective matter. This notion of agency centers on the figure of a lone individual whose intentions, plans, understanding, and control over actions apparently takes place in a world without others—at least at the point where these inner deliberations are taking place. Instead of this view, what the project of relational responsibility suggests to me is a new way of making human agency intelligible by understanding it as movement and dialogue within the ever present relational matrix.

This, however, raises other questions and problems with traditional ways of thinking based around the notion of discrete selves, particularly with ideas of freedom and determination, which are indelibly connected to blame and responsibility. The judicial systems of the Western world tend to work with the idea that a person can only be punished and blamed for their actions to the extent they are judged to be responsible for them, which is to say, that they are fully in charge of themselves and their actions. If it can be shown that a person was fully in control of an action, then they can be held entirely responsible and be made to pay for it. If, on the other hand, it can be shown that the person was in some way suffering from diminished responsibility, then the extent to which they are punished for an action will be mitigated. Yet all these notions rest on the fundamental belief in an individual cognitive system functioning in isolation