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This chapter explores the ways in which a relational understanding of the educational process might inform and transform university teaching.

Relational Intelligence and Collaborative Learning

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Education, within a postmodern perspective, is a revolutionary act. It is not the mere reproduction of established ideas or the inculcation of social norms. It is, rather, a generative process in which knowledge is constructed, not only learned or achieved. It is a creative engagement in social transformation, not only understanding the world in which we live. Postmodern education attempts to create practices whereby people become authors of their stories, develop reciprocal relations with others, and act in transformative ways (Freire 1970). And, in a world of social and cultural differences, this approach to education must also be an act of resistance.

Therefore, learning is something teachers create with their students—a process by which both students and teachers are transformed. In a world that is dominated by traditional, modernist pedagogies, speaking about a teacher's and a student's transformation may sound radical and problematic. Teachers are often viewed as the experts and the only “transformation” is seen as teaching “improvement” through experience. Similarly, students are viewed as “those in need of learning” and their transformation is seen as achievement of knowledge and competencies. Students' transformation is traditionally evaluated with the production of disembodied markings on computer-generated examinations where they demonstrate their ability (mostly) to memorize decontextualized information. Such a view of education is based on traditional assumptions of objective knowledge, information transmission, and educators' professional expertise.

But in a world of increasing access and never-ending information offerings, technology has far more power in proliferating ideas than any teacher could ever have. Thus, educators must be challenged to go beyond the simple delivery of information and knowledge and embrace what technology is still very limited in proposing. Educators are called to take their place as relational architects.

In this chapter, we explore the ways a relational understanding of the educational process might inform and transform university teaching. We offer a brief review of contemporary education to create the context of our discussion. Then, using the concepts of dialogue and “communities of intelligibility,” we present a way of understanding the educational process as a transformative one. Finally, we discuss the resources for action that these concepts might inspire as they are put into action in creating more collaborative educational contexts. We assume that a truly transformative educational process takes place when educators are relationally engaged with their students. Additionally, we assume that to be relationally engaged demands a reflective exploration of one’s own values and taken-for-granted ideas about education, learning, and knowledge generation.

Education as a Process of Social Construction

What we take as transformative education is informed by social constructionism (Gergen 2009a, 2009b; McNamee and Gergen 1999) where learning is described as a relational achievement. Social constructionism is premised on the following (Gergen 2009a):

The way in which we understand the world is not required by “what there is.” (5)

The ways in which we describe and explain the world are the outcomes of relationship. (6)

Constructions gain their significance from their social utility. (9)

As we describe and explain, so do we fashion our future. (11)

Reflection on our taken-for-granted worlds is vital to our future well-being. (12)

As we can see, to the social constructionist, we create and maintain meaning in relation to other people. Since meaning and knowledge are by-products of relations, neither can be merely conveyed from one mind to another. The implications of this orientation for education are significant. Now, education is conceptualized as a creative process in which educators and students engage in relations that collaboratively produce meaning. This perspective is aligned with Paulo Freire’s (1970) ideas and the distinction he makes between “banking” and problem-solving education, where “banking” presumes that educators/teachers “deposit” information into the minds of students (who are the depositories). Problem-solving education, on the other hand, refers to a view of where students and teachers engage in dialogue, becoming collaborators in the construction of knowledge. Freire (1970, 67) says further that “no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught.”

One important implication of this perspective is that it requires that we replace our emphasis on individuals and their internal motivations,

intentions, and perceptions with an emphasis on the coordinated activities of people engaging with one another. The process of teaching, as well as the teaching relationship, takes center stage, and attention to the content of what people do or say recedes as our major focus. Once knowledge is viewed as a collaborative construction, it is seen as a relational achievement, not a private, cognitive process. To the social constructionist, abstract information cannot be transmitted or internalized. Rather, what we take to be information (e.g., knowledge and meaning construction) is relationally accomplished as people coordinate actions to produce meaning that is deeply connected to their histories. Therefore, knowledge is not merely accumulated in the mind of an individual; it is generated in the constant embodiment of people relating with each other.

Because this educational process transcends traditional cognitive engagement of its participants, we prefer to address it as transformative. We talk about transformation in two aspects. First, there is the transformation necessary for addressing the active involvement of all participants in the production of knowledge. This is the transformation from the traditional hierarchical “banking” model to a collaborative orientation to education. Put otherwise, knowledge is the by-product of the continual coordination of meaning among educators and students. In their attempts at coordination, all are challenged to entertain different ideas, meanings, and understandings. The second form of transformation is the move toward recognition that the knowledge that emerges from coordination among educators and students creates an understanding whereby the world can be seen anew. Education is a transformative process to the extent that people are transformed as they relate (coordinate) and, at the same time, their processes of relating transform the way they understand the world. This orientation to education differs significantly from traditional orientations toward and practices within education.

Educational Traditions. There are many illustrations of alternative forms of education. Despite this wide array of experimental programs, it seems that schools, teaching, learning, and education overall remain within the dominant individualist discourse of our culture. We need only look to the common and expected practices within education. The focus is on individual students and their individual comprehension, ability, and performance. Standardized tests help us gauge how each individual measures up compared to the majority of age or level peers. These educational traditions emerge when the unquestioned focus of learning is on self-contained individuals (Macpherson 1962; Sampson 2008). We channel our efforts, in education, to the sole learner, and we judge knowledge and ability only of singular persons. When we look into the dominant activities that constitute what we call education, we see forms of practice that are conducive to conveying knowledge, thereby providing mechanisms to support our already existing structures (specifically, our educational system and the political and economic aspects of that existing system). This tradition is predicated

on the hope that education will serve as a stabilizing institution creating the sort of people who will fit into our already existing world.

What institutionalized education ignores is the constructive possibility of education. The institution of education should be recognized as transformative, as one that creates the world. We educate children so that they can learn not only how to live in the world but how to create the future. We educate adults to provide them with resources for becoming engaged citizens. Yet, when we treat teaching/learning as a domain where knowledge is delivered or dispatched to the unknowing mind, we imply that one mind has knowledge while another does not. Our argument for the relational construction of knowledge and a concomitant transformation in educational practice draws much support from Holzman's argument. Holzman (1997, 5–6) says, "a model of human understanding that is based on knowledge, that is, on knowing *x* about *y*—is education's chief structural defect. . . . Might it be that the overidentification of learning and teaching with the production, dissemination, and construction of knowledge is at the root of school failure, teacher discontent, and school mismanagement?"

Holzman's argument hinges on movement away from epistemological issues (e.g., issues of what knowledge is and, relatedly, what learning and teaching are) toward embodied activities. Embodied activities refer to those visceral ways in which we move others and are moved by them in conversation. We are talking about more than verbal or nonverbal aspects of our interactions. We are talking about those bodily experiences that also shape and are shaped by our relations with others. We share Holzman's sentiments and focus our argument on how refiguring teaching, and consequently learning, as a collaborative activity might open new forms of practice. Can we invite others into generative and transformative conversations where we create what counts as knowledge together?

There are several implications for learning and teaching when we speak of knowledge as emerging within communities of people working together. There is no uniformly right way to learn or teach. There is no universal codification of knowledge. Knowledge will vary from community to community. Various pedagogical theories, for example, will generate different understandings of what counts as knowledge and, concomitantly, what counts as an adequate demonstration of learning (or teaching). These judgments, in turn, will have serious implications for professional practice, and the conversations that take place in different learning contexts will vary, thereby expanding what counts as knowledge, as effective learning, or as good teaching.

Thus, education is not defined by a specific formula. With no predetermined formula to follow, how might we proceed in the doing of education? Can we begin to consider forms of teaching as relational performances engaging both teacher and students? When we do, teaching becomes a joint activity where new resources for action emerge. How can we engage in

teaching such that we approach it as a form of practice, an activity, a conversation rather than a technique for conveying knowledge?

Relational Intelligence. Informed by social constructionism (Gergen 2009a, 2009b; McNamee and Gergen 1999), we adopt a relational understanding where education is viewed as connected to the lives of educators and students, and thus is not viewed as neutral. We share our view of education with Lave and Wenger (1991) who argue that learning should not be viewed as the transmission of information but as a process of constructing knowledge (and values) in community. Values are important for us because they play a key role in the construction and regulation of knowledge. We understand that the most important aspect of learning is how it is described, narrated, and organized within interactions that are always permeated by socially and culturally constructed values. Such understanding allows us to consider knowledge from the vantage point of its cultural and mutable meanings, avoiding essentialized (and static) approaches. Knowledge is socially, historically, and contextually produced. This means that it is not a stable and universal phenomenon that is simply presented or discussed in school settings. It is also produced there, in the interactions and descriptions that permeate in the classroom relations. Thus, the very matter of education cannot be properly addressed if the presentation of what counts as knowledge neglects the elements involved in its production and regulation.

However, as we discussed earlier, traditional approaches to education seem to be organized around the idea that knowledge is stable and cumulative. Knowledge in this tradition is a product that can be distributed among a community of students, who are then expected to uniformly receive it. The relation between the individualistic values of modernism and the educational expectancy of homogeneous learning may look, at first, like a contradiction. After all, if people are seen as independent entities, why should we expect them to behave as equals in their relation to knowledge? The modernist view is that, although separate and independent individuals, each person (student) relates to a world that is represented in terms of true or false assumptions. This is based on the taken-for-granted notion that there is (or could be if only we had the “correct” tools for discovery) one single and “True” representation of reality. The method by which an educator teaches is viewed, in this approach, as a controlled way to guide students’ reasoning so that they can achieve the Truth. Therefore, homogeneity of knowledge is an expectation within an epistemological tradition that takes Truth as the ultimate goal of knowledge.

Where homogeneity is a characteristic of modern education, diversity or multiplicity becomes the trademark of a relational approach. Modernist education is concerned with conveying the one and only Truth or correct knowledge. The relational approach, on the other hand, is focused on coordinating a multiplicity of locally and communally constructed truths. We believed that the possibilities of coordination are expanded when educators

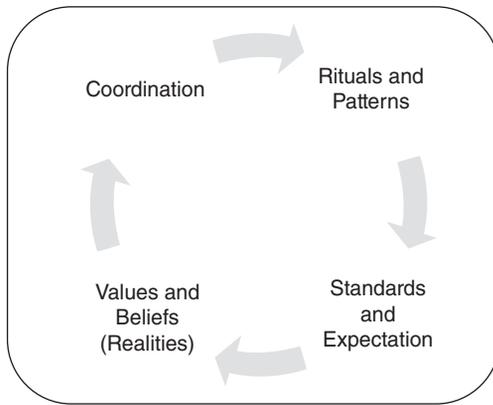
are aware of the social processes that generate, maintain, and transform local beliefs. We see knowledge as a set of coordinated agreements that become coherent within a specific community of intelligibility, with its unique assumptions and values. In contemporary times, a myriad of different communities coexist and generate different and often incommensurate values that, at the same time, are always intelligible within their communities of origin.

In this relational, process-oriented view of education, the job of educators is to create contexts where different intelligibilities can be coordinated. This requires a relational sensibility where all participants (students and teachers) can become genuinely curious about diverse beliefs and values, exploring the ways in which each intelligibility is coherent within its own context. In this view, the educator attempts to create a space where multiple intelligibilities can be voiced and respectfully heard. This requires relational engagement and an appreciation for the collaborative ways in which values and beliefs (meanings) are made.

The Process of Constructing Local Intelligibilities. The creation of values and beliefs emerges, as we have said, from a process of coordination. We might think, for example, of the first encounter between a teacher and a student. As the teacher enters the classroom, both student and teacher understand that the topic of conversation is focused on the student's academic abilities—the teacher questions and the student answers. From these collaborations, patterns and rituals quickly emerge (McNamee 2007b, 2014). Some teacher–student relationships might include questions that solicit a student's input on certain topics being discussed. The seasoned student might anticipate being asked for his or her input. These rituals generate a sense of standards and expectations that we use to assess our own and others' actions. Thus, if the teacher fails to ask about the student's ideas, the student might feel slighted or disrespected. Similarly, if the student fails to answer the teacher's questions, the teacher might feel that the expectations for the situation have been violated. Once these standardizing modes are in place, we see the generation of more global values and beliefs (i.e., social realities). We are left with an unquestioned set of assumptions about, in this case, how a learning encounter should go.

Beliefs and values are, in their turn, the basis from which new coordination can emerge. In other words, the beliefs and values that emerge from processes of coordination create what we are referring to as local intelligibilities. These local intelligibilities orient us within our future interactions, a process illustrated in Figure 2.1. We use this image to think about the production and reproduction of values and beliefs (local intelligibilities) as they inform the performances of learning (what we do when we learn; what is learning) and knowledge acquisition among students.

Figure 2.1 is offered only as a resource for understanding how the apparently simple process of coordination among people can generate entire belief systems and, in turn, how those belief systems might go on to shape

Figure 2.1. The Construction of Realities

the construction of further forms of knowing (and understanding). Making sense of the contextual and relational confluence of values and beliefs present in any interaction enables educators to appreciate the multiplicity of orientations and voices present in any learning context. This also helps bring into bold relief one's own values and beliefs and to recognize them not as the Truth but as one among many possible ways of knowing the world. As in any other context, the task in education is not one of producing consensus on values and beliefs—either by persuasion, by imposition, or by discipline—but one of exploring how we might coordinate differences, thereby expanding knowledge to include alternatives to the taken-for-granted understandings of our world. Coordination, encountered within a dialogic context, creates fertile ground for growth and change. Dialogue requires relational engagement. We turn now to a discussion on dialogue.

Dialogue. The use we make here of the word *dialogue* is a very particular one. First, we understand that dialogue is a responsive activity (Bakhtin 1982). It is focused on the process of communication, on how people are talking (and acting) in response to each other, and how their responses are mutually influential.

Second, dialogue acknowledges the different values and beliefs people bring to any conversation (Penman 2000). In this sense, dialogue is radically different from debate, where communication is aimed at persuading the other or at defending a set of beliefs. In dialogue, ideas are presented in the context of lived experiences. There is an attempt to avoid speaking from abstract positions (claiming, for example, “this is wrong” or “this is good”), and, instead, there is an effort to let the participants make sense of the different communities of intelligibility from which they originate. Instead of attacking or defending ideas, participants are curiously engaged in creating meaning. Thus, dialogue is marked by openness to diverse

understandings that are the by-product of coordination among participants (note Figure 2.1).

Third, dialogue is an ongoing and unfolding process in the sense that the meaning that emerges within dialogue is constantly changing and does not have a predetermined goal. Dialogue is not focused on any particular technique or content. Finally, no meaning, no conversation is ever ultimately complete. The meaning that emerges within an interaction is always open to further supplementation and thus to the construction of new understandings.

Julia Wood, drawing on the work of Bakhtin (1982), emphasizes that responsiveness is the key feature of dialogic interaction. For her, responsiveness “arises out of and is made possible by qualities of thought and talk that allow transformation in how one understands the self, others, and the world they inhabit” (Wood 2003, xvi). If we are responsive to others—particularly to others who have views that are incommensurate to our own—then we are open to critical reflection of our own commitments and beliefs. Incommensurate worldviews at play in the educational context might best be cast as the subtle opposition between right and wrong notions of what counts as knowledge, what counts as learning, and how education should be conducted. It is particularly the case within an Asian context where different ideas or behaviors are not viewed as wrong.

Therefore, a relational, dialogic approach to education requires that we shift focus from the content of what people are doing and saying (the delivery of neutral information) to the processes in which people engage and how their actions invite each other into particular rituals and relationships (i.e., the exploration of how varying values, beliefs, and “knowledges” have emerged). This is not to say that content does not matter; of course it does—particularly in the world of education. However, the dialogic focus we are proposing here encourages a pause, if you will, in our attention to content. When we emphasize process, not content, we are attentive to the ways in which we might build conversational domains where people can talk in different ways about the same (old) issues and content.

This means that our first task is to explore ways of creating a context (physical, relational, and personal) that invites participants to talk differently about how education can proceed. We believe that a focus on communities of intelligibility and dialogue, as formulated previously, can help us develop an approach to education where values do not need to be denied or oppressed. They can be acknowledged as part of human interaction, and then, as they are dialogically articulated, the possibilities for considering more complex understandings of what counts as knowledge and how knowledge is constructed can unfold. In other words, we believe that a dialogic approach in education can generate a more respectful and appreciative context—a context that allows diverse views of learning and knowledge to commingle.

Such a view of education holds certain requirements for educators. We believe that educators are called to be present in the learning context, which means that they must position themselves as participants in communities of intelligibilities and avoid speaking from abstract, totalitarian, and unanimous positions. The central aspect of a relational approach to education is that the relation happens between people as well as between people and their environment. For people to be in relation they necessarily need to be present, not as an institutionalized voice (the voice of authority—although that voice could always be a possibility)—but as cocreators of the cultural context in which they participate.

Resources in Action: A Case Illustration

In the remainder of this chapter, we offer a very particular case to illustrate how a relational orientation to education can be useful. We have selected a particularly challenging issue because we feel that, in doing so, the value of a relational, collaborative approach to education is readily evident. Our illustration focuses on a training program designed and implemented by Murilo Moscheta and Jucely Cardoso dos Santos for sex educators. The purpose was to explore issues of sexual identity because of the largely heteronormative biases endemic within sex education (Moscheta, McNamee, and Santos 2011). However, it is important to note that our main argument in the present chapter is not limited to the content of this particular illustration. We believe that a focus on processes of relational engagement generates a more democratic educational context where diversity of perspectives itself becomes an integral part of the learning process (and, of course, of knowledge creation).

The concepts of communities of intelligibility and dialogue have informed our work with groups and teams in different contexts, for example in the context of psychotherapy (McNamee 2009, 2011), communities (McNamee 2014), health care (Moscheta, McNamee, and Santos 2010; Moscheta and Santos 2010; Wasserman and McNamee 2010), and organizations (McNamee 2005). Here, we discuss the contributions of these concepts for educators, using a specific illustration focused on promoting inclusive practices toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in the educational context. The case, as presented here, illustrates constructionist theory and how we have embraced the challenge of translating it into a practice. We hope this discussion inspires the reader to embrace this challenge as well. Table 2.1 provides a list of questions that may be useful to consider when designing relational, collaborative educational programs.

Features of the Program. The project was initiated by an invitation from the Municipal Secretary of Education of a small town in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. The request was to design and implement a short-term

Table 2.1. Axis, Principles, and Questions to Organize the Design of Dialogic Training Programs for Sexual Educators

<i>Axis</i>	<i>Principles</i>	<i>Questions to Be Considered</i>
Creating the context for dialogue	Dialogue is not a debate. Stories are more relevant than opinions. Acknowledge and access participants' different communities of intelligibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the physical and material conditions of the space allow us to have a safe, comfortable, and welcoming ambiance? • Does the invitation for dialogue generate an appreciation for what participants might contribute? • Does the opening activity invite participants to be fully engaged in the conversation? • Does the activity invite people to tell their stories rather than give their opinions? • Does the activity allow the participants to assess their different contexts and communities?
Sexuality: In search of a definition	Appreciate difference. Allow curiosity and exploration instead of definitive explanation. Search for new and unsaturated possibilities for talking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the activity allow us to talk about sexuality as social and historical construction? • Does the activity invite participants to critically consider the effects of categorization? • Does the activity stimulate participants to generate new metaphors for talking about sexuality? • Does the metaphor foster the generation of new ways of talking about sexuality? • Does the activity favor an appreciative stance toward difference? Does it avoid judgment and evaluation?
Pragmatic concerns	Information must be contextually translated. Explore possibilities rather than definition of right/wrong. Give attention to the effects and repercussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the activity present information in a way that stimulates reflexive thinking, personal engagement, and contextual articulation? • Does the activity create relatedness between educators' stories and the presented information? • Does the activity allow thinking about responses as possibilities instead of right or wrong truths? • Does the activity invite participants to consider the implications of their responses rather than the truth they may express?

training program on sexuality for educators. The proposal defined that all educators would be invited for a 10-hour program. The program would be offered during the educators' work time, but participation would be voluntary. The expectation was that the program would cover broad issues in sexuality, with special attention to homophobia and nonnormative sexuality. The aim in designing the training program was to have educators engage in a reflexive process where they could simultaneously access, reflect, and amplify meanings they had constructed regarding sexuality.

The presumption within a dialogic orientation is that the practical resources for creating collaborative and relationally sensitive learning contexts emerge when educators engage in the exploration of their own values and move forward in the understanding of the relative nature of their construction. When educators are able to see their values as contextual constructions, they became better able to entertain values that are incommensurate within their own intelligibilities, and thus they can respond in a more flexible and sensitive way—that is, beyond the discourse of “right and wrong.”

Conference. With the assumptions in place, the program design consisted of a two-hour conference with optional participation in two four-hour workshops. Fifty educators attended the conference, which was planned to encourage their participation in the workshops. The conference, organized as an informational set of presentations, featured the variety of historical and contextual aspects that could inform one's understanding of sexuality. The conference presentations were designed to appeal to educators' memories and personal histories. At the end of the conference, participants were presented with a synthesis of the challenges educators face in dealing with sexuality in the school context and with an invitation to continue the discussion in two subsequent workshop meetings. Among the 50 educators who attended the conference, 40 (divided into two groups of 20) decided to participate in the workshops. Workshops were offered at two different times to accommodate educators with different work schedules.

Three thematic axes organized the workshop activities: (1) creating the context for dialogue, (2) sexuality: in search of a definition, and (3) pragmatic concerns (see Table 2.1).

Creating the Context for Dialogue. The first workshop activity aimed to invite the educators into dialogue. In order to prepare them to engage in this difficult task, they were asked to write their concerns and questions about sexual education on colored paper. The colored paper was indicative of the level of difficulty they experienced talking about these concerns and questions (little difficulty/green, some difficulty/yellow, and a lot of difficulty/red). This allowed for an open discussion of the concerns and questions presented anonymously. This discussion was followed by a second activity where, in small groups, using different graphic resources, the group was asked to produce a collage that expressed their perceptions toward sexuality.

These two activities emerged from the understanding that when people gather for a dialogue, they each come from a particular position or network of relationships that contribute to their thoughts, feelings, and meanings toward the topic of concern (Chasin et al. 1996). If participants want to make sense to each other, they need to speak to those positions. The activities were planned to help gauge how to be responsive to participants' needs and create a safe context for dialogue.

Second, these two activities invited the participants to present their questions and concerns, and afterward organize them within a framework that expressed their perceptions toward sexuality. The assumption was that doing so could offer the group the possibility of accessing the communities of intelligibility from which they each come. In this way, participants become contextualized; they offer stories that render a rationale for the construction of their values. By opening the workshop in this manner, the hope was to create a context where speaking from abstract positions ("It's wrong to be homosexual!") and engaging in the debate that usually emerges from these abstractions was avoided. Positions are debatable; they easily create polarizations (right/wrong, good/bad) and foster a conversation organized to persuade or defend (McNamee 2007b; Sampson 2008; Stewart and Zediker 2002). Instead of positions, participants were invited to share their stories and were stimulated to be curious about both their own stories and the stories of others.

Thus, in both activities there was no attempt to answer participants' original questions, but to create a context for the group to explore those questions together and create connections among their experiences inside and outside the classroom. There is an important difference between opening the workshop asking for their questions and, for example, opening the workshop asking for opinions on a specific issue. Once focus is placed on the relational process, we are concerned with the different effects that our questions can produce. Specifically, asking for their questions invites participants to look for what they want to know. On the contrary, asking for their opinions invites them to look for what they already know. If questions can create space for curiosity and the creation of a collective search for meaning, opinions can easily be presented as isolated perspectives that must be scrutinized or defended.

The activities have the potential to generate a complex description of sexuality that is contextually and historically situated once it is based in personal histories. Participants can see how their stories help to create what they take as sexuality. Because the activity is in a group, they can also see the variety of understandings about the same issue. The activities can favor a greater understanding of the process by which values around sexuality are generated, and they invite participants to reflect on how their own values and sexual education have informed their performances as educators.

Sexuality: In Search of a Definition. The second thematic axis focused on giving some information about the different components of sexuality,

how sexuality is categorized in social discourse, and how these discourses operate in order to stimulate or discriminate different expressions of sexuality. The previous activities were designed to generate the context in which participants could see themselves as part of a historical and social process. This historical perspective created the conditions within which to discuss sexual identity categories as contextual. Therefore, the next activity invited participants to try to define sexuality. They were stimulated to think about its different dimensions, such as body, emotions, gender roles, desires, and sexual identity.

When the discussion about categories of sexual identity is preceded by an appreciation of how sexuality and values are historically dependent, it is easier to foster a discussion in which categories of sexual identity can be understood as artificial productions. The categories are artificial in the sense that other communities/relations will very likely create alternative ideas and values about sexuality. There is no one “True” meaning that supersedes all others. Essentialist and naturalized views on sexuality can be more easily deconstructed as the social and historical production of categories becomes evident. Usually, the following step in this deconstruction of sexual identities is the reflection about the arbitrary prioritization of one category over others and the resultant oppression and stigma. When educators become familiar with these categories as social productions, they also are able to see these categories as strategic descriptions, as Foucault (1980) would say, for social transformation.

As we have learned, the power of dialogue resides in its potential to generate new descriptions about experiences that have been repeatedly described in the same way. When those saturated descriptions change, a new venue for understanding is opened and new relations and resources can emerge (Gergen, McNamee, and Barrett 2001; McNamee 2007a; McNamee and Gergen 1999). One way of promoting such transformation is to invite people to talk about a situation that evokes less intense emotion and that is less saturated by values and judgments. That was the goal when participants were invited to engage in an activity where they had to identify a favorite season as they listened to Vivaldi’s *The Four Seasons*. This activity created a context where they could talk about their preferences, how they identified them, and what they thought contributed to each preference, among other things. The group was then asked to discuss sexual identities using the ideas generated by the reflection on their preferred season. The use of a metaphor (the season in this case) helped the participants discuss sexual identities in terms of their preferences, emphasizing how those preferences were a by-product of multiple, relational contexts and how they had fluid and interdependent qualities, thereby avoiding the reproduction of a hierarchy of sexuality. The metaphor of the four seasons offered a positive model to approach difference, where preferences did not need to be evaluated (as right or wrong, normal or abnormal) but could be appreciated as a diversity that enriches our experience in the world.

Pragmatic Concerns. From this point, the workshop moved to more pragmatic concerns, which made up the third axis of the program. In the next two activities, the legal regulations and guidelines for work with sexual diversity in school, as defined in the *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCN)*, were presented. Since the previous activities had focused on creating a dialogic context, it was not difficult for participants to actually relate to the information, raising dilemmas and engaging in a critical and creatively reflexive exercise. Without the dialogic context in which information can be personally and historically related, the presentation of guidelines would be unlikely to be critically received. This is the fundamental difference that defines education as a collaborative, creative, and transformative process: the creation of relatedness among one's history, the interactive moment, and any given information.

Finally, the group was divided into two subgroups and asked to role-play two different problematic situations drawn from their own experiences as educators. They were challenged to create different endings for these dilemmas. Again, the aim here was to generate a complex and multidimensional understanding of sexuality that would not allow single and standardized responses. The participants were invited to produce responses that were sensitive to the different rationales involved in the situation, and at the same time they were stimulated to think of them not as the right answer or solution, but as possible responses with particular implications.

One advantage of the relational and process-focused approach that informs this project is the possibility of the approach itself to become a resource for educators; the approach could be used to evaluate educators' responses to students, for example. The relational focus allows the educator to think about his or her responses to students no longer as limited to content (good/bad, right/wrong) and invites, instead, a consideration of the pragmatic implications of different perspectives.

New Ways Forward

In this chapter, we have attempted to articulate a conceptual orientation (social construction and dialogic process) to education with a specific interest in exploring how we might prepare educators to work in more collaborative and participatory ways—ways that invite the co-construction of what counts as knowledge. This is what we refer to as “relational intelligence.” It is very important to highlight that we are not presenting a technique. Our focus is on relational processes that encourage relational intelligence. We consider technique a predefined strategy that is applied in a context and/or situation. Once it is predefined, it cannot be responsive to the participants in the interactive moment. Furthermore, we agree with Paulo Freire's critique about the use of pedagogical techniques as a way of reducing and dehumanizing relations (Freire 1998). What we are offering here is an approach that we define as a set of “resources for action” that might be taken as an

inspiration. These resources are constantly put to use in response to contextual and relational demands. This means that we are never doing exactly the same thing when we draw upon a particular resource. This difference is very important, for what we have been presenting here is, above all, an effort to articulate an educational approach that is focused on the process and not the content of education and learning. To that end, our illustration of sex education should not divert attention away from broader issues of educational practice.

We believe that education must move beyond any essentializing discourse of what counts as knowledge and the unquestioned presumption that expert knowledge is the most important. In order to make such a move, values and beliefs that serve as the impetus for action in the world must be explored. One way to explore the construction of values and beliefs is to create contexts where communities of intelligibility can be explored dialogically. We hope that the ideas we offer here can inspire the design of new learning environments where collaboration and a diversity of views and levels of expertise can be coordinated in attempts to make better social worlds.

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