HUMANISING CONVERSATION: RECONNECTING WITH LIFE

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ABSTRACT

The authors have been aware of pervasive dehumanising processes and their toxic effects on limiting the optimal development of human potential. Living in a rapidly changing world we are constantly confronted with diverse systemic challenges to survive and to maximise our adaptive capacity. One of the most accessible processes to enhance human wellbeing has involved conversations with a wide range of both professional and nonprofessional conversational partners, especially in times of uncertainty, crisis, and times of personal challenge. We demonstrate, based on our personal experience of participating in a dyadic conversation, that such conversations are able to enhance creativity, vitality, understanding, and facilitate deep relational learning. Given the complexity and widespread distribution of systemic challenges to human wellbeing, the current findings provide an accessible yet core process for enhancing human wellbeing. In this article informed by social constructionist assumptions we set out the basis of such a claim through an exploratory analysis and illustrative case study of one such dyadic conversation. The extension of theory and practice through further research and application of such accessible conversational learning has much to offer in countering the increasing dehumanising processes in society.

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KEYWORDS: dyadic conversation, dialogue, humanising, creativity, wellbeing, learning.

INTRODUCTION

Why would we settle for less of learning and life, when we can experience so much more? As two practitioners, concerned about the limitations of theory and practice in diverse disciplinary contexts and driven by a passion to optimise our human knowledge and practice, this question is one that has and continues to challenge us from time to time. Could it be that the way in which we have attempted to understand and deal with this concern might be too narrow and limited by traditional and learned ways of thinking and enquiry into furthering human development? It is our experience, confirmed by researchers and practitioners in various disciplines relevant to human development (Jordan, Lanham, Crabtree, Nutting, Miller, Stange &McDaniel, 2009;Von Glasersfeld,2006), that this may well be the case. Over many years of regular dyadic conversation aimed at experientially learning more about human development we pieced together a particular way of interaction and learning which we initially named, *Fridaying*, reflecting the designated day of our conversations. This article aims to expand on a previous article (Hoelson & Burton, 2012) regarding our initial experience of the beneficial processes and effects of dyadic conversation. We hope to further explore, describe and illustrate certain of the holistic humanising effects of one of our dyadic conversations by discussing significant and meaningful experiential moments in the conversation and how these relate to uniquely human qualities and processes such as creativity, vitality, learning, and personal identity.

PARADIGMATIC INFLUENCES

Guided by social constructionist assumptions (Cunliffe, 2008;Freedman & Combs, 1996; Gergen, 1999; Hosking & Pluut, 2010)we chose a narrative research methodology(Boje, 2001; Goncalves, Matos &Santos, 2009)that is congruent with human conversation (Meares, 2004; Salvatore & Gennaro, 2012;Shotter, 2005). Through this methodology we demonstrate how identifiable 'striking' (Lowe, 2005) or 'living' (Shotter & Katz, 1999) conversational moments (Goncalves et al.,2009) arise and describe their experiential humanising effects (Barrett-Lennard, 2007; Bohart, 2007;Schmid & Mearns,2006;Todres, 2002; Wampold, 2012)on us, as conversational partners, and to explore their wider implications in diverse conversational contexts that have as their purpose the optimisation of human living and learning (Anderson &Gehart, 2007;Barrett-Lennard, 2011; Barrett-Lennard, 2007; Bohart, 2007; Heron, 1996; Keet, Zinn & Porteus, 2009;Lerner, 1995;Ryan & Deci, 2000;Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2006; Stacey,2003;Todres, 2002; Wampold, 2012;Whitehead, 2006), while simultaneously but indirectly eroding dehumanising processes and their toxic effects on human beings (Bastian & Haslam,

2011; Keet, Zinn & Porteus, 2009; Music, 2014; Todres, 2002) . The nature of such conversational learning and its relationship to certain humanising processes will be discussed in relation to the relevant literature after we have demonstrated the nature of such conversation. Finally, the implications and potential benefits of wider applications of such dyadic conversations will be explored and recommendations for further research in this field will be offered.

While such dyadic humanising conversations share certain characteristics with psychotherapy, teaching and learning, and communication processes in organisational contexts, it is their humanising nature (Bai & Banack,2006; Gharajedaghi, 2007;Quick, Nelson, Quick,, & Orman, 2001; Stacey,2001) which is the focus of the current article. These characteristics relate a wide variety of other relevant constructs but it is not our purpose to review all these constructs or to integrate all such constructs into a holistic theory in the current paper. The exploratory nature of the current illustrative case study (Mann, 2006;Morra & Friedlander, 1999)and its aim to illustrate the actual emergence and nature of certain humanising processes in one of our dyadic conversations precludes a discussion of such other relevant but peripheral constructs. The current study is best viewed as focusing holistically on the dynamics and process of action-in-a-single-dyadic conversation rather than as a positivistic reductive analysis of dyadic conversation in general. While the process and constructs of the conversation could have relevance to other conversational contexts their unfolding and sequence in the current study will in all likelihood not be directly generalizable to such contexts due to the large number of ecosystemic (Borrell-Carrio, Suchman, & Epstein, 2004) influences involved.

METHODOLOGY

We chose a stepwise and systematic process to analyse the transcript of the selected conversation. We first read through the selected dyadic conversation several times to obtain an overall impression and contextual understanding of both the content and process of the conversation. Thereafter we identified segments of the conversation that in our opinion as participant-researchers would best serve our purpose of illustrating the creative potential of our conversation as identified in our aim of the current study. In congruence with the constructionist approach of the study we conducted an idiographic data driven analysis (Barlow & Nock,2009) of the conversation extract to identify data relevant to our research aim. Essentially this process involved asking the data questions and noting the relevant answers as verbatim words, phrases, sentences or larger units of data that we then coded and categorised in accordance with the content and processes we wished

to illustrate in the current article. As this article is based on a constructionist and narrative approach we arranged the data categories to convey a coherent and meaningful illustrative case study of our conversation.

Awareness of the importance of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004) as criteria of rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative research served as constant guides of the research process. For example, we have described relevant aspects of ourselves as co-researchers, the current narrative research approach, the research context, the process of data collection and analysis. In addition, we have been co-participants immersed in several similar conversations over a number of years and the current conversation to acquire sufficient familiarity and experience of our dyadic conversations.

The series of conversations from which the current one was selected form part of the study for which ethical approval of the Research Management Subcommittee of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Research Technology and Innovation Committee was received in May 2009. As co-authors and participant-researchers we have both also agreed to the publication of this illustrative case study.

Any conversation or communication requires that detailed attention be given to the contexts (Peterson, 2005)from and in which such interactional processes emerge. The current study concerns only one of a series of conversations that have taken place over the past seven years between the two authors. The original emergence of our conversational learning was discussed in our previous article and will not be described here. The conversation which is the focus of the current paper was chosen at random from the series of dyadic conversations we had with each other during 2014. It was decided to employ this single conversation rather than the entire series of conversations as all the conversations are of a similar nature and were all accompanied by essentially similar humanising effects on us both.

CONVERSATION CONTEXT

Contrary to the traditional sequence of a scholarly article where the literature review usually precedes the analysis and interpretation of data, the current articlefirst presents the context of the designated conversation, then the process of the conversation, followed by the thematic findings and only then discusses the concepts derived from the data in relation to the relevant published literature. This sequence is more congruent with a data driven narrative and conversational approach.

The current conversation took place on Friday morning, 16 May 2014. This was a mutually suitable

arrangement which allowed us to engage in conversation for 60 to 90 minutes at a time. The conversation took place in a public space, namely a café located close to the Indian Ocean in our home city, Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The café provided a suitable venue where in a beautiful setting overlooking the ocean, we could relax while conversing and enjoying a cup of coffee. Although the venue is not what some would regard as a traditional research space, we found it to be sufficiently private to engage in and record our conversation. As our common agreed purpose was mutual learning from our conversations and not psychotherapy or debate we did not experience any inhibition due to the public nature of the location. On occasion we have changed our initial seating due to the high level of conversational noise from patrons in adjacent seating.

After finding suitable seating where we could engage in conversation in relative privacy we began with our usual introductory talk. Such beginnings usually concern diverse topics and observations that we personally experienced or that arose spontaneously as we explored potential foci of mutual interest or engagement. In the past, for example, we have been struck by the beauty and grace of dolphins swimming in the sea in front of the café where we met, the experience of a reckless taxis endangering the lives of road users, something of interest we had read, or experiences in our work contexts. We were not aware of any potential conversational value of these spontaneously emerging topics initially but engagedsmoothly but without any feeling of real connection, energy, or enthusiasm about any of these potential topics. If a topic did not lead to further engaging conversation we moved smoothly onto the next topic until we experienced one that was of mutual interest and energising to us both.

THE CONVERSATION
In the conversation that is the focus of the current study we began with a few minutes of light hearted banter about selecting a particular conversation for the study. We then randomly selected a conversation from the series of conversations we had during 2014. Chris then referred to the reason for choosing a single conversation as the focus of the study: "*So in a sense [it] is the acid test of what we've been saying. You should be able to take any one and it would be fine.*" This highlighted our consistent experience of the humanising effects in all our conversations up to that time.

After further explorative conversation around Rod's work experience a metaphor emerged when Chris said "*I wonder if it's helpful to think of oneself and them as a family ...*" to which Rod responded "*I've died but ...*" followed by Chris responding with "*You died but you still there*" and Rod replied "*Ja*"

(colloquial term for yes) . Chris then asked "*Is it like having somebody with a terminal illness?*" To which Rod replied, "*Sort of.*" The conversation continued to flowsmoothly without much conscious plan, effort or deliberation during which Chris explained his attempt to understand Rod's experience visually as a focus for their joint attention. Rod expressed uncertainty about the terminal illness metaphor that Chris offered with "*Well it's not terminal and it's almost like I said I'm going to divorce you but I'm going to divorce you in 18 months' time.*"

Rod experienced the divorce metaphor as a better fit with his experience and we continued talking about his work context using this metaphor. After a while Rod said that this metaphoric exploration of his work context had been helpful to him and that he intended taking concrete action by writing a letter to the person concerned. He added that, "*I feel very good. It is my own fault that I take it all on me*". Chrisre framed the latter part of Rod's response as due to Rod being "*a compassionate caring person. That's why it is difficult ... you've got to try look for a way to make it a little bit less painful. Because it's ... you've not done anything wrong*". However, Rod replied "*It feels like it is.*" Chris acknowledged the difficulty of this challenge "*But it is a tough bugger, this guilt, blame.*" and continued to explore ways of ameliorating this painful context by connecting to his past experience of "*... showing ... students a DVD of Stephen Madigan ... a narrative therapist, doing therapy.*" and

> *... thinking about that. This is becoming more real. Here is this guy saying 'I'm struggling because of this damn nervousness inside of me is making life hell for me'. ... I'm just thinking about that. These things can wreak havoc with our lives, like encroach and limit and restrict our, not happiness in the happy clappy way you know but our enjoyment - not enjoyment even, but our life*" (author emphasis).

Chris then made a biblical connection "*I mean it just makes me think about the weeds and the seeds and how it just chokes the life out of one.*" Rod brought this exploration of emotional pain to a more positive ending with "*... this is really helpful. So thank you. I don't know what I do with it. But it makes it very ... it gives me a handle. A very big handle to say 'Okay now'*".

Rod and Chris continued to explore the significance and potential value of such dyadic conversation even if it meant merely acknowledging in conversation that they did not know how to solve a particular problem or continue the conversation. Having arrived at a consensual understanding of the root challenge involved in desiring to help someone in a painful and difficult situation which appears to be devoid of an

immediate specific solution, Rod continued with "*I read a chapter the night before last. I was thinking this is it. You've just opened it.*" The author of the chapter was Dorothy Soelle, whose theology writing

> *resonates with what we're doing, I'm just not sure how. But here is what she ... this is what struck me. She said we start with myth. ... Then what we do is to take the myth and make an understanding out of it.*

Rod struggled to express fully this felt relevance and connection,

> *What's this? And we can hear echoes with these things.... The story conversing in our lives. I mean I just ... I just ... it struck me now. When I read it I thought this has something to do with me now. I just can't say – ja maybe that's it. We saying 'Wait a minute. Stop living in the books and all the rest of it'. Life is to be found, I wanted to say further back.*"

Chris also connected to the unfolding conversation on the role of narratives in human living,

> *We can create stories or tell stories to try to understand, try to make sense. To try to live with whatever we're experiencing because I suppose we need the stories. We need some cognitive thing to try to make sense of an experience. If something feels good or bad or whatever to say well this is why. We make stories to make things better I suppose a lot of the time ...*

Rod reconnected to the previous divorce metaphor,

> *Well maybe it's here. It's this place. You hear the story, there's this divorce. What does that mean? Before we get into writing a textbook about divorce theory!.... That's the help. That's the life she was saying. When you live here you become divorced from life.*

Chris continued the connection to the divorce metaphor, "*Divorced from life! So a lot of the ideas, the sources whatever, I'm trying to understand this. So I'm trying to use it a little bit.*"

Chris then spontaneously discerned a significant conversational theme:

> *The language! The force! I've been listening and all that kind of stuff, so I'm thinking all those things. You exposed to those things in a very big way, but then it's logical that you in a certain sense lose touch with where you are. I mean nobody has been where you are. Similar places but not there. And so how must you make sense of that. I suppose we try a bit on our own but the problem is we may ... it seems like we kind of perpetuate certain faults. Certain*

ways of thinking. Ja, old ways of thinking and we get captured by those. Imprisoned and restricted because we trying to fit into that. Instead of saying, 'Hey wait a minute? Let's see what is this? What is happening here? What can I? How can I create ... make sense out of this? Can I create a meaning out of this? Can I find life in this? Because that's the crux I suppose. I don't know? I would want to live, and say how can I live a little bit less conflicted. A little bit less uncomfortable with where I am.

We continued exploring how narratives and other knowledge connected to our conversation when Rod said "*We just conversing with life.*" To which Chris added, "*Struggling.*" Rod continued, "*This is the life and I try to make this connect to myself.*" Chris continued this line of conversation

> *And I forget what that consists of. It's also been built up by various people and then becomes a kind of dominant story and so on. Ja and that may not be my way and a lot of those things might actually limit my life. Because they developed in other places at other times so on. Some of these are useful, others not. But I can't seem you know I must make sense of my life, of where I am. And then in a sense I can use some of those things, but I can't – I've been maybe working the other way round. Making sense of my life using these things. Then finding they not working that well.*

To which Rod responded

> *You know I think about it. It's even more than that. I forget about my life and I start looking for my life, where is it. I can't find it, well then there must be something wrong with me. This is the truth. This is the truth I was taught.*

Having provided the contextual process of the designated conversation, the following segment of the discussion deals with the core "grain of sand" and the "difference that makes a difference" of the study.

THE CONVERSATIONAL CORE
The most meaningful part of our conversation was concern about our "*search for something [that we experienced as] missing in life*" which we linked to having "*done something wrong*" or having made a mistake. This perceived wrongdoing was related to our joint desire to write a paper but which, at the time, was influenced more by an external focus than our authentic personal interests and meaning. The main reason for resisting writing from such an external frame was due to not seeing "*life in there.*" and experiencing a lack of desire, energy, and motivation as a result. Rather, we were intrigued and

driven by the surprising emergence of a shared need to develop a deeper and broader understanding of what we experienced as "*missing in life*" at the time.

This thematic segment of our dyadic conversation then ushered in what we experienced as a natural but resonating shift in content to "*child development and narrative ... because they adhere close to the initial story* [of human development]. " The connection between our personal human need to survive the challenge of writing and "*the true, the real model, the real experience of how human beings develop.*" especially during early infancy emerged from my previous reading in this regard during our reading and my training and practice as a clinical psychologist. Although the content and nature of our development as authors and the language, cognitive, and socio-emotional developmental challenges of infants differs greatly, it is the isomorphic processes of human development that we have in common. Chris highlighted that:

> *Obviously the conflicts differ but the processes should be quite similar [in] how we learn certain things. So if we learn as human beings to conceptualise and to think and to abstract well, a child is going to show you how that happens.*

This conversational connection between our own experiential knowledge involving the challenge of writing and psychological survival to cognitive knowledge regarding early human development during infancy is "*what's useful. It resonates. It seems to give a real alternative*" and "*not just a, 'I'm thinking this.*" The conversation enabled us to connect and integrate abstract theory and experiential practice of such knowledge which is often presented as fragmented and separate. Through our conversation unintended connections emerged that reflected a deeper and more comprehensive and holistic understanding of human development. We found ourselves spontaneously exploring what could be related to "*conceptual ability and development of language. Development of human thought. Philosophies, theology: thoughts about anything.*" The previous momentary experience of having made a mistake in our intended writing from an external frame spontaneously changed to a realisation that "*It* [our writing] *has to come through us. We've got to produce it. We've got to create it.*" But wondered, "*So what's that process about?*"

One of us then spontaneously made a connection to a previous experience of assisting someone who wished to write a book "*about the systems that are contrary to human development. ... and thinking that I should introduce him to knowledge creation.*" which

> *is essential to what we are doing. I mean if we think. If we are writing. I do have some experience but I want to think about it. I*

want to make sense of it. I want to understand it and I want to communicate it to somebody.

In comparison to the previous barrier associated with the perceived external focus and the overwhelming volume of historical writing, our own seemed "*such a small spark*" that was accompanied by personal discomfort. "*You very vulnerable… felt very insignificant. Very disempowered.*" We questioned the value of our momentary inspiration in comparison with the intimidating magnitude of historical writings. "*I am just saying that how can it have value? I mean look at those things, they're thousands of years old.*"

Our experience with feeling stuck in our writing also related to a broader and more holistic human concern regarding "*I mean, how must I survive? I've got to take on this task ... I want to survive. I must take on this responsibility.*" The desire and responsibility to search and explore how to live a fuller life was also associated with a social concern:

> *I could end up and find a little community that affirms this but maybe they don't affirm everything that I need. What then? Then I sit again in the same position and then I've got to find some other way of ensuring that I live. Because that's what I want to do.*

This conflict between agency and community of wanting to express ourselves authentically in writing and the simultaneous desire for social acceptance, was one of the central or core themes of our conversation.

The powerful desire to maximise our experience of human life, particularly in relation to our focus on writing at the time of the conversation, was driven by a need "*to make sense of stuff. And I want to make life, all the time.*" The experiential knowledge we were driven to create was linked to making or living "life" rather than only acquiring intellectual or cognitive knowledge about life. "*Otherwise you get stuck and then that's part of the thing. There's no life because I can't see where to connect it to.*" Furthermore, the absence of an immediate solution for or way out of our then experiential dilemma was accompanied by our on-going concern about "*To where must we connect it because there doesn't seem to be something available right now.*" Simultaneously we also realised that "*So that's why we talk to each other and you mentioned ...Oh wait a minute, there seems to be some sort of resonance here, a re-cognition. That felt a bit life-giving. I don't know why. It could be a little bit of a ...*" The response to this unexpected spontaneous life-giving spark of inspiration by the listener was that we "*Could go back to listening to someone and then helping them.*" which was then strongly affirmed by the first speaker. We spoke about how, if an immediate solution was

not known or forthcoming one could *"... try to be as present as possible in terms of listening to you. In a sense, listening to myself too."* and wait for resonant content to emerge that related to our intention *"to create life."*

The desire to know and make sense was not limited only to our own learning and how it links to other bodies of knowledge but was also connected during our conversation to the potential to use our learning and experience of our conversations to assist others through our practices as allied health practitioners. Such interactions in our opinion do not seek to solve problems directly but rather aim to stimulate a creative process of personal reflection and spontaneous connection to extant bodies of knowledge that become available to individuals through particular types of conversation. During such conversations the dyadic partners are not pressured or required to know or to provide specific solutions to problems. Rather, the mere sharing of spontaneous ideas that emerge in the conversation by either of the participants related to their shared conversational purpose is the primary task or process of conversation. The challenge to make sense, meaning, and life together through conversation then becomes the *"greatest gift I can give. The most helpful gift I can give is to help someone make meaning of the situation regardless of what they then do with it."* This process of co-creating meaning we connected back to our earlier conversation of child development where an isomorphic human learning process takes place through conversation usually between mother and infant.

The difference that our conversation made to the learning that was taking place was *"what's useful. It resonates. It seems to give a real alternative. ... It's not just I'm thinking this"*. This contrasted with purely abstract cognitive knowledge and learning which is not connected to the experiential human knowledge and learning of the participants. The significant value of such emergent knowledge and learning is that it was spontaneous, relational, embodied, and more holistic in nature and was a closer approximation of what creative human knowledge and learning entails. The experience of co-generating such knowledge and learning through our dyadic conversation spontaneously affirmed and enhanced an essential aspect of human being and development: not only our relational nature which can be expressed in the African concept of Ubuntu (I am because you are) but also our embedded systemic life contexts. The primary importance of such knowledge and learning is to *"ensure that"* a person

> *is able to live... like a human being. Not like an animal brought up by wild animals. Because there are certain things that happen in the process of development that make us,*

> *ja that make us human. That enables us to be human.*

DISCUSSION

Having contextualised the process and content of the designated conversation of this study, we continue with a discussion which connects significant themes from the conversational data above with relevant published literature.

As the series of conversations had as their main purpose our mutual learning, the presence of such learning was a consistent reminder of our aim in our conversations. Any group, no matter how small, needs a central purpose to act as a common goal and potential measure of the goal directedness and meaningful action of the group. This aim also enabled us to differentiate our conversations from similar but different conversations, such as psychotherapy, counselling, pastoral care, advice giving, teaching, and conversations engaged in by managers and employees in organisational contexts. Our conversations are aimed at our mutual learning based on our experience of and reflections during such conversations, i.e., reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983). Another criterion of relevance in these conversations was that they were experienced by us as stimulating, creative, energising, and humanising in terms of biopsychosocial and spiritual dimensions(Borrell-Carrio et al., 2004; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). To enable us to maximise our potential learning we found it was essential to approach our conversations with an open appreciative attitude of mind and a willingness to suspend our initial judgement regarding the potential value or significance of any topics or observations that arose during the conversations. These qualities resonate strongly with theories and observations expressed by Barrett-Lennnard (2007) and Bohart (2007).

The major theme of the designated conversation concerned its humanising nature(Ryan &Deci, 2000; Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2006). By this we mean that the series of conversations and the current one in particular were accompanied by several biopsychosocial and spiritual experiences Borrell-Carrio et al., ,2004) associated with being more fully human(Barrett-Lennard, 2007; 2011; Rogers, 1957; 1959). We do not view these experiences as linear effects that follow a cause in the traditional positivistic science paradigm but rather as complex non-linear processes as found in second order cybernetics (Bateson, 1972; Gharajedaghi, 2007)and complex living systems (Jordan et al., , 2009). Several authors have referred to similar human processes and experiences. A sample of contributions include human creativity (Kanisauskas, 2014; Montuori, 2012), humanising pedagogy (Keet et al., 2009; Rodgers,2002; Zinn & Rodgers, 2001), human wellbeing (Ryan &Deci, 2000; Ryan &

Frederick, 1997), holistic health (Heron, 1996), narrative therapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996; White, 2007), relational (Reynolds, 2007), integrative (Wachtel, 2004; Wampold, 2012) and humanistic psychotherapies (Barrett-Lennard, 2007; Bohart, 1999, 2007; Mearns &Thorne, 2013).

As in conversation generally, participants may know what they intend to discuss especially if they have agreed on a specific purpose for the conversation but they do not know how the conversation will proceed nor do they know what the specific content that will emerge from their participation in the conversation. Metaphorically, much of human living is of a similar nature. We may know what we would prefer in specific circumstances but we would not know how or what will unfold in such uncertain conversational contexts. This resonates strongly withHans-Georg Gadamer's (1989,p.383), words:

> The more genuine conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus, a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct ...more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it...a conversation has a spirit of its own, and the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it - i.e., that it allows something to 'emerge' which henceforth exists.

The humanising nature of certain types of conversations have been documented in diverse contexts without specifically focussing on the mutual humanising process. It is our contention, based on our experience of our dyadic conversations, that the further recognition, exploration, and description of this process is essential to counter the increasing systemic dehumanisation(Bastian &Haslam, 2011; Haslam, 2006; Haslam, Loughnan, Reynolds &Wilson, 2007;Waytz & Schroeder, 2014) of human beings in micro-, meso-, and macro-systems (Bronfenbrenner&Ceci, 1994) globally. The past and current fragmentation, erosion, and specialisation of humanising processes serve to restrict and limit access to the benefits of these processes to those in greatest need.

Another major theme that emerged in our designated conversation isone of the most significant and urgently needed in our contemporary human context of multiple and rapid systemic changes taking place throughout the world. Being able to create knowledge and resources to address such changes in the current context demands a systemic increase in human creativity for continued human survival and wellbeing. Although creativity in the current study is concerned mainly with its occurrence in dyadic conversation, this does not limit its broader potential and application in other larger group contexts.

Sundararajan and Averill (in Richards, 2007, p.196) state that,

> ...a creative response must be effective in meeting some challenge or standard of excellence. Two other criteria for creativity are novelty and authenticity. Novelty requires that the response be unique to the individual or group, and authenticity requires that the response originates in the self, as opposed to being an imitation or copy.

Creativity can be viewed as both a major humanising process and a product of the series of our conversations where it has manifested in several and diverse ways. Creativity has been the concern of several disciplines since the beginning of human history and is an essential process of human adaptation (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; Montuori, 2012), particularly in times of crisis and uncertainty when other more traditional processes and bodies of knowledge and research methodologies are found to be wanting (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; Montuori, 2012; Montuori & Donnelly, 2014). Congruent with Kaufman and Beghetto's (2009) model of creativity, the creativity that emerged during our conversation was of the "little-c" type which is inherent to the learning process itself, in contrast to "Pro-c" and Big-C".

In the designated conversation creativity appeared both verbally and nonverbally, for example, as humour, metaphor, and the discovery of novel connections between several concepts and multiple bodies of knowledge as the conversation progressed. One of the first creative humanising processes to emerge in our conversation was the light hearted humorous phase during the first moments of the conversation. Humour has been viewed as a purely human characteristic since antiquity and there is evidence of its humanisingnature in its enduring presence in human history, its role in enhancing human wellbeing as in laughter therapy and other more traditional therapies as well (Adams& Mylander. 1998; Kulman, 1994).

An additional significant humanising process to emerge in our conversation we experienced as an energising process which manifested as spontaneous animated conversation of high energy and natural flow as we explored both individual and mutual connections to other concepts and knowledges. Such intense mutual conversational engagement was accompanied by a natural but focussed presence and attention as we listened and responded actively to each other. Shawver (1996)highlights a similar process in relation to Lyotard's argument against Jurgen Habermas' concern for consensus in conversation rather than parology which Shawver describes as:

...the ongoing creation of meaning. You say something and it inspires me to say something in return. Consensus, Lyotard tells us, is merely a stage in our conversation. What conversation can give us can be much more valuable than that. It can bond us to the process of a dialogue that requires both our parts, and when it works successfully it can awaken our minds to an unending expansion of new ideas (p.1).

The energising process we experienced is congruent with subjective vitality(Ryan & Frederick, 1997, p.529), "a positive feeling of aliveness and energy" which reflects "organismic wellbeing" and "should covary with both psychological and somatic factors that impact the availability of energy to the self"(p.529). Furthermore,

This positive sense of aliveness and energy refers to more than merely being active, aroused,or even having stored caloric reserves. Rather, we believe it concerns a specific psychological experience of possessing enthusiasm and spirit that we refer to as vitality (p.529).

According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan and Frederick, 1997) subjective vitality is an experience of being full of energy especially energy that feels to be one's own, feeling enthusiastic and alive in body and spirit. The historical origin of vitality is to be found amongst psychodynamic theorists who highlighted that, "conflict resolution and integration are associated with an increased availability of energy to one's ego, or self (p.530)." They also link vitality to several other concepts such as autonomy, integration and self-actualisation and experiencing oneself as a fully functioning person (Rogers, 1957, 1959).

The availability of sufficient energy, an environment conducive to mutual conversational learning, and the open and attentive presence by both of us enabled a process of deep personal learning to take place. As we stated previously the conversation was not pre-planned and had no set agenda except that we had agreed that it should enable us both to learn from participating in the conversation. The type of learning that emerged in the series of conversations, including the current conversation, was experiential, having a deep rather than a surface focus or an attempt at the solving of problems, with no pre-set goal or content, and holistic in the sense that it was open to any content that either of us had to offer or share. Such learning often took unexpected turns and almost without fail created connections with seemingly disparate topics and bodies of knowledge.

The most significant theme of the conversation concerned our feeling stuck and imprisoned by old myths, stories, and ideas. During the parological to-and-fro of the conversation a potential liberating process emerged which we referred to as "*connecting to life*". This relational process which was not linked to any specific techniques, steps, or strategies was accompanied by a heightened sense of vitality, dyadic engagement, an increased flow in the volume and depth of potential concepts to which it connected us, and an experience of wellbeing akin to feeling more fully human. It was also accompanied by a desire to "connect to life" by telling the story of our humanising conversational experiences to a wider scholarly audience to gauge the social relevance, meaning, and value of such experiences.

CONCLUSION

The study describes and illustrates certain meaningful humanising processes of a specific form of dyadic conversation informed by a postmodern and narrative perspective. These beneficial processes which emerged in our conversation were identified and described in rich detail through a thematic analysis of a single randomly chosen conversation between the two authors/research participants in order to provide an initial understanding and conceptualisation of the value of such conversation. The paper provides a contextual and in–depth description with appropriate illustrations from the designated conversation that ranged from an initial conversational theme regarding a shared experience of something lacking or missing from their lives that we associated with an over-emphasis of an external locus of meaning and value. A significant focus of the conversation was the emergence of creative, spontaneous, and non-deliberative resonant connections to multiple other domains of human knowledge that were accompanied by several creative humanising processes and states of human wellbeing. The explorative and post-hoc nature of the current illustrative case study does not aim to directly generalise to other contexts but serves to demonstrate the real potential for interested parties to critically explore the isomorphic nature and possible further extension of dyadic conversation in diverse contexts.

Due to the highly beneficial experience by both conversational participants of biopsychosocial and spiritual wellbeing during and after the conversation that included renewed vitality, creativity, knowledge, and happiness, further conceptual and contextual exploration and conversation with other interested parties is recommended to refine and extend this initial expression of humanising conversation.

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