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Editorial: Responsibility, Solidarity, and Ethics in Cogenerative Dialogue as Research Methods

Wolff-Michael Roth

At least since *Phenomenology of Spirit* (HEGEL, 1806/1977), it has been clear that humanity is built on the dialectical relation of individual and collective. That is, in my singularity I am an expression of the plurality of being; and the plurality of being finds its expression in my singularity as in that of others. My actions are such that another recognizes in them actions he or she not only finds intelligible but could have brought about himself or herself. To be an individual, conscious being (subject of consciousness) presupposes the collective, which is required for anything like a language, meaning, sense, or culture to exist. Without others, we are not. That is, we always are *with* others, *through* others, and *for* others. Without others, there is no individual subject of consciousness; and without individual subjects of consciousness, there is no society, no culture, no collective consciousness. [1]

This way of thinking humanity generally and individual being specifically comes with radical consequences for collective life, everyday praxis, and (qualitative) research. Most importantly, if we human beings, in our singularity, are co-dependent on and co-constitutive of other singular beings, then this comes with a responsibility *for* the other, whose existence is dependent on mine as much as mine is dependent on him or her. It also means that there has to be a fundamental solidarity, as our dialectical, mutually constitutive, and presupposing relation to others means that we—all those that constitute collective life—are in it *together*. The most fundamental sentiment therefore should be that of solidarity with the others, who are nothing but expressions of the same being that we share, constitute, and produce. (This does not hold some of us back exploiting others for their own private interests.) Solidarity with others is a fundamental component of an ethical perspective. [2]

An ethical perspective on life can be defined as "Aiming at the true [vraie] life with and for others in just institutions" (RICŒUR, 1990, p.211, my translation). Living up to our responsibility that comes with (always my ["je mein"]) being as the condition for the generalized other leads me to solidarity as a fundamental ethical principle. Here, solidarity is not only is a sense of being in it with the other but also the ethical demand to work together with the generalized and specific other to produce and reproduce the true life—i.e., collective life in which we practice responsibility for the other. [3]

Solidarity is a practice that we are used to mostly from worker movements and from the kindness of giving during times of great disasters, where especially the poorer people—e.g., the Innu of Labrador sold their belongings to be able to give—assist disaster-stricken peoples around the world such as the famine in Ethiopia, the tsunami victims in Banda Aceh (Indonesia), or the earthquake victims in northern Pakistan. Solidarity is much less practiced in those institutions that prepare the next generation of active citizens, schools; and solidarity is

especially not practiced in schools that serve the poorest of the poor. School administration, teachers, guards, and even police are on one side in the inner-city schools especially of the US, whereas students, most of them African Americans living in poverty, stand on the other. An "us versus them" spirit reigns in these institutions, and a student can gain social capital among his peers by "dissing" (disrespecting) a teacher (e.g., ROTH et al., 2004). These schools, in my experience, often exhibit greater resemblance with prisons than with institutions that enact a society's needs to reproduce itself through the formation of its youth. [4]

This is precisely the point where cogenerative dialoguing praxis comes in, and what it was invented and developed for (ROTH & TOBIN, 2002). Having cotaught with the teachers of inner-city schools as part of our research, we (Ken TOBIN and I) have come to realize that these schools cannot be changed unless the students themselves were involved in working together with teachers to bring about environments that are conducive to teaching–learning relations. We began to use cogenerative dialoguing, which literally means making sense together in and through democratic dialogue form, as praxis of making sense together with students, new teachers, regular teachers, university supervisors of new teachers, and other researchers who together had participated in a lesson. We established a heuristic consisting of a list of items that we could use—in real time—to check whether all participants in a cogenerative dialogue had equal opportunities and took equal responsibility in making these dialogues democratic forums in the construction of understanding of the events that we had lived together in the classroom. This dialectic of having and (exhibiting willingness of) making use of opportunities is capture in pairs of statements in the heuristic such as "Each participant is provided with the opportunity to speak and to be heard" and "Each participant *takes* the opportunity to speak and to be heard." [5]

Consistent with Karl MARX's eleventh thesis on FEUERBACH—whereof the philosophers are interested in understanding the world when the real issue is to change it—we subsequently began experimenting with using cogenerative dialoguing not only as a way of analyzing research data together with all concerned stakeholders but also as a means of transforming the classrooms. Participating in cogenerative dialoguing began to mean for students to take control over their school life. The more they participated, the more control they had over the conditions of their learning. [6]

Initiating and practicing cogenerative dialoguing at the intersection of changing social life and researching social life means enacting responsibility and solidarity in the sense elaborated above. It also means that there are ethical issues that come with collective life generally and with an active, change-oriented life in particular settings specifically. Ethical issues arise everywhere because the plurality of being *presup*-poses our singularity, therefore different, differently positioned, and *dis*-positioned (NANCY, 2000). Gender, age, race, culture, institutional positions, and so on all are categories that not only have been used to mark difference but also have been used as resources for producing difference. [7]

In this special issue, the authors present and discuss ethical issues that arise from collective responsibility, solidarity, and cogenerative dialoguing praxis. My own "Collective Responsibility and Solidarity: Toward a Body-Centered Ethics" (Wolff-Michael ROTH) sets a general, philosophically oriented framework that contextualizes the feature article, "Who Gets to Ask the Questions: The Ethics in/of Cogenerative Dialogue Praxis" (Ian STITH & Wolff-Michael ROTH). [8]

To begin a debate, the feature article is followed by three commentaries, written by authors who have different perspectives and concerns but all of whom share the view that the ethical perspective is central to both research and the praxis it assists to change. In the first response, Christopher EMDIN and Ed LEHNER articulate their perspective from an inner-city situation and the role of a cosmopolitan ethics. In the second response, Kathryn SCANTLEBURY and Sarah-Kate LAVAN, who have extensive experience of working with urban female youth, show us how cogenerative dialoguing can be re-visioned to become a feminist pedagogy and research praxis. Finally, Mijung KIM grounds her ethical perspective on cogenerative dialoguing in enactivism and the embodiment of knowledge and action. [9]

To take the idea of a debate even further, and to provide a reflexive component to the topic of this special issue on cogenerative dialoguing, the final text brings together the authors of the feature article and the respondents, highlighting some of the salient topics that have issued from the text and responses (STITH et al.). Having some experience with researching, teaching, and writing articles and books out of cogenerative dialogue praxis—to the point of using it as a genre of writing (e.g., ROTH & TOBIN, 2004)—and knowing how they can encourage debates in the readers' settings, I hope that readers take this final text as an occasion to continue the debate wherever they are located (positioned!) in the world. [10]

Wolff-Michael ROTH, Editor *FQS* Debate "Qualitative Research and Ethics"

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