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Multiloog about everyday life

Introduction

My name is Heinz Mölders. I am a psychologist and an artist. I work together with other people in my own INCA Projectbureau Amsterdam and in the Foundation IPC. I would like to tell you something about my work in the last twenty years with the meeting groups called Multiloog in Amsterdam/the Netherlands.

Its aim is to promote communication about (problematic) everyday life experiences. In this context, an important question is, how to create a “safe space” for self-understanding and constitute supportive and preventative circumstances in this process. Aim and purpose of our work is to establish a form of discourse in which people can develop their own perspective. There are enough other perspectives which lead us away from understanding our own self as a social subject living in social circumstances. For example, the discourse on illness interferes with a process of understanding. So we have to look and find tools which help us to find and develop our subject perspective. We find these tools in the subject science approach from the Critical Psychology in Germany and especially in the ideas of Klaus Holzkamp about self-understanding in everyday life (*Soziale Selbstverständigung im Rahmen alltäglicher Lebensführung*) and during the work of ALF (*Arbeitsgruppe Lebensführung*) a research group about the conducting of everyday life of people, working in different areas in Germany and the Netherlands and meeting twice a year in Berlin.

After telling you about some organizational and practical experiences, I want to present you our theoretical background.

In short, an important part of the theoretical background is the process in which we try to transcend the common conditioning discourse (*Bedingtheitsdiskurs*) with the reason discourse (*Begründungsdiskurs*) through which the reasons for human actions can come into focus.

I hope I can give you some more information in detail about the different aspects of this project.

‘Multiloog’: what does it mean and how do we work?

“Multi-logue” of “Multiloog” means that a “multitude of voices” finds a response. This may be a multitude of voices that speak within a person (for people who hear voices) or the voices of different people in society. It is essentially an exchange process that aims at developing an understanding of one’s own experiences of every day life inclusive (psycho-social) problems along with those of others. But the main aim of Multiloog is to create a safe space for everyone to be able to speak about important aspects of daily life.

Multiloog means that many different groups that have to deal with mental suffering participate in the exchange. Mental suffering is inextricably bound up with everyday life, the social context in which we live, and social and cultural processes. People with very different backgrounds are invited to participate: users of psychiatry, relatives, partners, and mental health care professionals, neighbors, professionals, trade unionists, human resource officers, politicians, architects, and policemen on the beat. Mental suffering manifests itself in many places in society. Those who wish to reflect on it from their various roles are given the opportunity in a Multiloog. We explain the participants that we don’t use the medical language in trying to understand what’s going on in

the life of people and also we try to avoid the traditional psychological language because it makes it difficult to understand how people come into crisis, experience heavy fear or be very anxious.

Organization

At the moment we organize different meetings mainly in community centers in different areas of the city of Amsterdam as well as in other cities of the Netherlands and Germany. In 2012 we organized about 50 meetings with 600 participants.

Beside the regular meetings we organize the so called Art-Multiloog. That is a group in which we combine the verbal form of expressing our experiences with working with sculptures, paintings, poems, a written text or making a piece of music. In some of these workshops we produce these things, in other workshops people bring the different things, produced at home, with them to the meeting and then we talk about them.

At the moment we get our money from local authorities and from funds. We have to find funding each year.

I am responsible for the organization and counseling and I get help from colleagues as ambassadors, as expert by experience in different parts of the organization and from people who got a training as counselors. Beside these meetings we organized seminars and workshops for health care workers in the frame of specialized training and peer consulting.

Working rules

In order for the meeting to proceed in an orderly fashion, a few rules have been made. The first is that the participants must be able to tell their own story. Others listen to these narratives and try to understand them and, when necessary, ask questions so that the story is clear and, if possible, try to create more depth to understand it better. This is the most important rule during the meetings. There is no commitment to contribute to the meeting by way of speaking. One may just listen. The objective is to open up a serious talk. It is also important that participants support each other by listening. If this does not happen, one runs the risk that the meeting will lose its character of 'liberty'.

Another central rule is that the encounters during the meetings are based on equality. In other words, the objective during the Multiloog meetings is to achieve equality, to analyze this and finally diffuse it in mutually strong relationships.

Everyone in the group is equal and is considered an expert because of his or her position and individual experiences. Nobody has more right to speak than another; therefore nobody is forced to be silent.

Another rule is that people who recognize something in the narrative of another participant, he or she can react with his or her own experience and avoid to give advice or avoid to give a suggestion, and at least try to avoid to start a discussion. That is because this can create an unsecure atmosphere because it is very often coming together with inequality.

Particularly those who open up during the meeting and talk about their experiences sometimes describe the atmosphere as being "unsafe", when very general remarks are made, instead of referring back to one's own experiences and perceptions.

Multiloog meetings are not therapeutic or treatment meetings, though they do sometimes have therapeutic and learning effects. Their prime objective is the development of mutual understanding, respect, and the exchange of experiences. Here we learn a lot from each other.

Subjects

Subjects range from problems in daily life with the chaos in the own home, problems with going to bed in time, having too much food or drinking too much alcohol, to experiences of having deep feelings of depression, how to manage something like psychosis, borderline or getting along with other diagnoses until having thoughts of committing suicide. A lot of people want to talk about their (very often bad) experiences with psychiatry. Mental health workers (students participate on a regular basis) talk about the circumstances in which they have to do their work but mainly they get the opportunity to talk here about themselves as a person rather than as worker.

How can we learn to see each other as a participant of the world: theoretical background
The development of Multiloog has a theoretical foundation. In view of the starting-points of the project, it was essential to apply a psychological approach that would enable the subject to describe his or her problems not only “from inside”. To be taken into account were the aspects of individual life history, the social context and the relation of mental suffering to everyday life.

The Danish psychologist Ole Dreier put it as follows: “We aim to gain “a richer and more concrete and lively understanding of the person, paradoxically, not by looking directly “into” the person, but by looking into the world to grasp the person as a participant of the world” (Dreier, 1999, p. 30). This is easier to say than to do and we have to find help to concentrate on our daily life events. Like Ole Dreier we get a lot of inspiration from the subject-scientific approach of Critical Psychology, from which our view is derived. It appeared to offer important theoretical and methodological leads for the objectives of the project.

The point of departure for the subject-scientific approach within Multiloog, is not a mechanical causality model (cause-result/*Bedingtheitsdiscours*), but the so-called discourse of the reason (*Begründungsdiskurs*). This is based on the fact that every kind of human action is founded on subjective reason, which has not emerged from the cause-result-scheme. The communication process is focused on finding out the meaning of the subjective reasons. The “reasons” lie in the interest of individuals to be able to keep a grip on their lives. ”Interest” here refers to “interest in my life”, meaning the sustaining of and extension of my own quality of life in order to be able to lead a “fulfilled and rich” life without fear and pain. A important question is as Klaus Holzkamp says: “How can I reasonably act in my interests” (Holzkamp. 2013) During the verbal communication process of the Multiloog project, other participants are asked to explain their subjective reasons. Nobody is an object from the viewpoint of another; nobody has the privilege of talking about someone else if he/she is asked to remain silent. Critical psychology means that everyone is able to analyze her/his experiences and it demonstrates to individuals that they can choose for self-determination and autonomy (Osterkamp, 1999).

These theoretical considerations have had a lasting impact on Holzkamp’s (1996, 2013) concept of conducting one’s life (*Lebensführung*), being the chosen method within Critical Psychology and Multiloog. Conducting one’s life is about the organization of everyday life in relation to the relevant goals one has. On the basis of this concept, the intention is not to develop a model or manual on how one should live optimally, but rather it is concerned with the barriers that impede individual development. It also questions the conditions for organizing your life when these conditions seem to contribute to the very problem that is to be overcome. In the analytical process, the term *soziale Selbstverständigung*, which means social self-understanding, is important. In the first place, this term allows for the process of self-reflection i.e. “inner communication”, to be realized. By adding the term “social”, it becomes even more clear that I, as a person in the context of the organization of daily existence, am involved with other people. The term social self-understanding also implies reciprocity, that is to say, inter-subjectivity.

This means that the process of self-understanding allows us to take into account someone else’s perspective along with opening up the possibility of inter-subjective involvement. It is about the

subject's point of view, the "I", meaning the general "I" (In German the construction is 'je ich'). The subject's point of view in this formulation necessarily includes the involvement with another person's perspective.

Multiloog approach

As the theoretical background to Multiloog's approach makes clear, the point of departure of the Multiloog project is to find the expression for one's own (emotional) experiences in relation to the social context in daily life. This is a general orientation. The participants determine how things happen in practice. For example, whether they experience their problems, conflicts, etc., as an "illness" or not, or whether these problems are not externally induced or dictated.

This is in contrast to the meetings which take place under the denominator "psycho-education" which are, among other things, aimed at obtaining an "insight into illness." In the case of Multiloog there is not a one-way exchange of information. It rather involves an "inter-subjectivity exchange", which means telling one's story, responding, asking questions, etc. It presupposes that within every individual there exists a "hidden" knowledge or knowledge which has been revealed. The point of departure here is not "knowing" but rather "not knowing". So it is not only important to learn in the Multiloog meetings how we get along with each other, but almost to learn to find out about one's own tricks and scheming, to learn and see one's own blind spots and so promote becoming an expert in one's own experiences.

In the process of opening up and expressing one's experiences and conflicts, there then results paradoxes and questions which arise from the participation of the separate participants in a meaningful "conversation" during their search for a solution to their problem. Or in more theoretical terms, the dialogical process is concerned with the unfolding and analysis of the enormous amount of information that shapes the relationships and contradictions which individuals develop during their lives. A point might then be reached, through the sifting of this information, that allows for a judgment that certain kinds of information are directly related to the problems at hand.

In order to be able to discuss the problem and experiences of *alltägliche Lebensführung* every day living, without this leading to fear and threats of a further decline in one lifestyle situation (restrictive type of action potency), it is necessary to create special conditions which allow for an open exchange. One of the most important issues for our work is to translate the conditioning statements into the reason discourse and that means looking continually at a lot of aspects which have influence on the "free space" and to look at the conditions that make it possible that we can enable the processes of social self-understanding.

Thank you very much for your attention. Mange tak.

Amsterdam, June 21, 2013

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