The Choice in the Moment
Joint experiences in a network team within social welfare services.

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Abstract

This article is a report from a TAOS Associate Grant project in 2017-2018. The purpose of the project is for the author to take part in ongoing practice of collaborative-dialogical meetings in a network gathering team within social welfare services in Sweden.

The Norrköping Network Team is a group of four people who over the years have worked collaboratively within the public social services. They see families and young people who the social workers regard as needing support. My agreement with them as a grantee of this project was to take part in a few meetings, reflect together with the team and make a report.

For the hosts, the network gathering team, the range of choices from one moment to the next, draws on all kinds of sources from training and lived life, as well as offerings from all participants in the meeting. For me as a visitor, our reflections have resonated with ideas of perceiving human life as relational being.

Acknowledgements

A starting point

Having returned from a time of study at the Galveston Family Institute in the Fall of 1989 to my work at the Church Family Counselling in Hedemora, Sweden, I was a bit disappointed. I was doing just the same work as before I went. What had I actually learned? Thank God, that winter I had remarkably interesting clients, and the chairs in my therapy room, a catch from the basement of the Parish Hall, felt more comfortable than before. As months went by and there was a steady flow of remarkably interesting people into my office, I began to reflect.

Quote from my translator's preface to *Från påverkan till medverkan* [From influencing to collaborating] a collection of five articles by Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishian published in Swedish in 1992

Purpose of the study

> The mindset of this study is a shift in thinking
> towards an awareness of what is about to happen
> rather than a pursuit of premeditated plans.

> Joint experiences of the people involved will be connected
> to ideas of perceiving human life as relational being.

> The fragile fabric of joint recognition,
> is seen as the center of network gathering meetings in human dilemmas.

The purpose of the Taos Associate Grant project reported here, was to take part in ongoing practice of collaborative-dialogical meetings in a network gathering team within social welfare services in Sweden. My position in this project is that of a visitor and a friend to a group of colleagues.

The intent of the project is to take a small step in the direction from *expert* culture to *dialogical* culture. It is inspired by the book by John Shotter: *Speaking Actually* (2016) and Nora Bateson's book *Small Arcs of Larger Circles* (2016).

> Instead of expecting our *thinking* to turn *inwards* to tell us what next *to do*, we must turn *outwards* to 'see' what is before us afresh, with the hope that a new way forward can be opened up, and a blocked way left behind.

John Shotter, 2016 p 21

> The ink of interrelationship bleeds across the boundaries between professionalism, academic research, and the banality of daily life.

Nora Bateson, 2016 p. 15

Structure of this essay

What kind of writing can contribute to the sense of dialogical presence?

A reflective practice is not easy to describe. As my colleagues invited me to a viewpoint close to their everyday tasks, I write about what I met during my visits, their regular work and day to day decisions. Descriptions of practical details, organizational parameters and excerpts from dialogues recorded in my meetings with the team (translated into English), serve as means for an effort to let the reader come a little bit closer to their "landscape of possibilities" as I quote John Shotter further down in this text.

I will start with a few words on the origins of network gathering meetings in a Swedish context.

Background
Network gathering meetings and their way to Sweden.

The British anthropologist J. A. Barnes in his community study of relationships within a Norwegian island parish in the 1950s made up a concept of *network,* saying that every person has contact with several persons, and some of these persons have contact with one another and some don't. One person's network is not a group distinguished within borders but consists of all the people who are important for this person (Barnes in Svedhem, Ed. 1985 p. 21). A book by the American social anthropologists Ross Speck and Carolyn Attneave: *Family Networks* (1973) was translated into Swedish with the title *Det sociala nätverket* (1975). This book inspired the staff of a Child guidance clinic in the southern suburbs of Stockholm, and also staff within social services in the same area. Parallel to the progress of systemic family therapy, the need for including a wider network around children and young people was urgent in those areas where very few of the inhabitants had relatives or connections nearby. The crisis agency for children's network [Sw. Krismottagningen för barns nätverk] was started there in 1989. Inspiration from network thinking became important in counselling and family therapy.

More books in Swedish on network therapy and network gathering processes have been produced over the years, (Klefbeck,J & Ogden, T, 1995, Forsberg, G. & Wallmark, J. 1998, Moody Källberg et. al. 2013, 2018). In most of these books the American child psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner has a prominent role with his ecological view on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The first Nordic conference for network therapy was held in Stockholm in 1993, and a "Network for network therapists" has been erected. Workshops and training programs gather professionals in many places. Network teams are now present in many places in Sweden, and in the other Nordic countries.

I have heard Harlene Anderson talk about how you as professional can position yourself as a learner (Anderson, H. 2012 p. 16) These network people indeed see themselves as learners. Another Swedish network team was interviewed at a "Systems Café" [see next page] in Stockholm Family Therapy Association. On the question "what helps you in developing your work", one of them replied "I like working together with people who read books". His colleague added: "Our network unit was put into the group working with violence in families. We were not very keen on that connection to start with. However, we have learned so much from them, and the families we see, they benefit from that!" This is the language of learners, I think.

Dialogical characteristics

There is no standard procedure for a network gathering process, no licensing structure. That could be a limitation. Having seen the work in Norrköping I would rather say that it is a fruit of the dialogical structure of the work. Needs and contexts in the situations at hand are hardly compatible with a rigid format of professional performance.

In getting to know the Norrköping network team, I sensed that I must walk in direction of a shift of meaning. I started with a collaborative and dialogical perspective, still with the team in center of my perception. I am moving towards an ecological complexity with a unique history and many possible perspectives. My initial inspirers to this project: John Shotter and Nora Bateson, have things to say about that shift of focus.

> As a first step in beginning to think in a dialogically-structured manner, rather than as external agents wholly in control of the unfolding processes of importance to us, we need to see ourselves as being internally related to still-in-process, flowing 'worlds' of intermingling activities, activities which, as they flow through us, influence us as much, if not more, than we can influence them.
>
> John Shotter: On being dialogical: An ethics of 'attunement' *Context 2015.*

> I am giving up on interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and even meta-disciplinarity. The world is not made of disciplines. I still hold the work of my academic colleagues in high esteem, but I no longer place the academy at the center of the solar system of knowledge. … The studied subjects never get put back into their relationships, and the contexts never seem to be describable in the data.
>
> Nora Bateson: *Small Arcs of Larger Circles. Framing Through Other Patterns p 79.*

My own meetings with the Norrköping network team over the years.

In the Stockholm Family Therapy Association, they have a tradition of Systems Café, where they interview a person or a group about their work in the field under the headline "What has inspired those who have inspired us?" In 2012 it was my turn to be interviewed. We talked about my long-term contact with the Houston Galveston Institute, translations of writings by Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishian and my own writings within Swedish family therapy work over the years. The place was crowded, and the interviewers were two old friends, Gunnar Forsberg and Johan Wallmark, both among the initiators of Network Processes in Sweden (Forsberg, G. & Wallmark, J. 1998). One of the listeners caught my attention: Maria Bark from Norrköping had

driven for two hours with her children in the car, handed them over to her brother in Stockholm who put them to bed and was going to carry them sleeping into the car after our meeting to drive back home. I was impressed, and intrigued – what did we have in common that resonated with this eagerness?

Several months later I met the whole Norrköping network team, then consisting of Erik Hjort, Björn Holst, and Maria Bark, at a similar event in Stockholm. From that night I got a picture of three individuals, who delightfully shared how they could use their different experiences in their joint work. I wanted to get to know them better, but at the time that was not likely to happen.

An unexpected welcome to Norrköping

A new chance to meet the team appeared. We were going to meet at a conference in Finland in 2016, *Respecting Otherness in Networks of Relationships*, with participation of Jaakko Seikkula, John Shotter and Tom Arnkil. It was to take place in Rovaniemi at the Arctic circle in June, in the midnight sun. However, in the middle of February, the whole meeting had been cancelled.

A couple of weeks after the cancellation message, I got another invitation, sent to all the people who had signed up for the Rovaniemi conference:

> *We, network team of Norrköping, are now thinking of and planning other ways to meet you, our colleagues and friends, from other countries and cities.*
>
> *Our idea is to host a gathering that would be small, intimate and dialogical, focused on conversations and exchange. Maybe the themes and topics can be something about language and systems, collaborative therapy and network, Open Dialogue and network etc. Our idea is to make it as an international exchange, which means we would like to see balance and diffusion between countries.*

The Norrköping team had discussed this possibility with Jaakko Seikkula, who had appreciated the idea. Under the label *"Let's meet, let's create, about network meetings and open dialogue"*, using the same dates as had been intended for the Finland conference, they invited people to come on the following terms:

> No conference fees. All participants arrange and pay their own travel and hotel. Participants send suggestions for their own contribution: questions, themes, workshops, roleplays or presentations etc. (Hosts arrange a program - aiming to make all voices heard.)

What a wonderful way to handle a shared disappointment! I immediately signed up for the workshop and got a letter:

> *Since this invitation was a result of an impulse of inspiration, we don't have much extra time to make plans, administrative capacity or budget for arranging a big conference. What we can do is to host all you people in Norrköping, facilitate two days of dialogue and totally trust our joint creativity. Our ambition is to create a meeting place where dialogue can arise, and knowledge and experience be exchanged. We are absolutely certain it will be magic!*

A few months later, forty people, from seven countries, met for three days in Norrköping, a city in the southern part of Sweden. located inside a bay of the Baltic sea.

Small groups and plenary conversations, music and movement. A sense of ease and expectancy was tangible. There were network teams and individual participants from seven countries and a variety of professions: We listened to Nora Bateson:

> "There is order and there is chaos. The liminal space between chaos and order – that's learning." "Boundaries are interfaces of living mutual learning". Nora talked about her and her father Gregory Bateson's challenge of the academic hierarchies. The challenges for us as humans and for our world do not fit into the columns of hierarchical knowledge and prestige, each of them confirming itself and directing what knowledge that counts.

I imagined the "columns of academic hierarchies" as giant marble pillars and saw my own efforts over the years to conform to sometimes nonsensical requirements in training and professional life. In recent years my own research in local history, I had kept separate from my psychological and therapeutic thinking. How come? I knew that I longed to combine those resources. The next day I was given a chance to check if people might be interested in what I had been doing back home. I talked:

> By looking into the history of my own village I have been introduced to a whole culture shaped before modernity, and before the psychological description of the human being. I can see that choices made in the late 17th century have had tangible impact on events more than two hundred years later. And even more surprising: things that have been described as individual enterprises, at a closer look displayed a multitude of mutually shared ideas and activities. Combining local lore, old maps and parish registration with old objects and early photography I have come in touch with survival skills and shared creativity beyond my imagination.

The response from the workshop participants was very encouraging, and I saw that, not only did they think that I had found interesting things about my ancient neighbors. I also got comments on that I had applied a reflective and ecological perspective that might be useful in other settings where lived life waits to be depicted. I was happy and thankful to the Norrköping team that enabled this seminar.

The ability of the Norrköping team to turn an unexpected hurdle, the cancellation of the conference in Finland, into a new contribution, made a lasting impression on me.

One participant said about the team after the workshop:
> "It's good fun, it's so odd, your way of going about this. In a somewhat sluggish way, you walk into these new ways and forms of expression… And you have got that within yourselves, that playfulness, you like doing things in playful ways."

 I looked for opportunities to keep in touch with those people.

The planning of a project

Letter from Kerstin to Norrköping Network team March 2017

As mentioned above, I was impressed by the team. Several months later I wrote this letter:

Dear friends, Maria, Björn and Erik
When I met Maria and Erik in Stockholm the other week, I heard that I am still welcome back to visit your work. That call got a life of its own, and now I have a question for you.

For many years I have been a Taos Institute Associate. Now there is a yearly endeavor, Taos Associate Grant. This means that I as associate can apply for a grant regarding a project that the Taos people find worthwhile. So, I am thinking of a small assignment on your work.

Apart from letting me in when I visit with you, there is one task I want your help with. My last visit will involve an evaluation of how our conversation, and my writing about it, has been helpful for you?

Response from Erik

Hi Kerstin
Without really understanding what you are asking for or what it will lead to, we unreservedly and whole-heartedly say, Yes. You are welcome to us. In general, and specifically. If you have suggestions on dates and times, please let us know as soon as possible. Spring is already quite booked up.

With the above approval from the team I applied for a Taos Associate Grant project with the purpose to take part in ongoing practice of collaborative-dialogical meetings in a network gathering team within social welfare services and connecting their work to ideas of perceiving human life as relational being.

In planning this study, I had tried to find *themes* or *concepts* that might be of value to reflect on. However, in my meetings with this team, one conversation led to another. The many different meeting points in their work were not easily swept up into any concept formulation. It was more like the "liminal space of learning" quoted from Nora Bateson above, or what John Shotter might have called a "moving around in the landscape".

> … the process of *resolving* on a line of action cannot be a simple matter of calculation, or of *decision making* as a choice among a set of already clear alternatives; it involves *judgement*, a moving around on the landscape of possibilities while being *spontaneously responsive* to the consequences of each move and judging which one (or combination of moves) best resolves the initial confusion – for, to repeat, we are operating here, not in the realm of actualities but of possibilities. [*italics in original*]
>
> Shotter, J. 2010 p 14

Presentation of the team and their workplace

Nätverkslaget i Norrköping, [Eng. The Norrköping Network Team], is a group of four people, Maria Bark, Jenny Fritsch, Erik Hjort and Björn Holst, employed by the Social welfare services executive agency for children and young people, (in resemblance to Child Protective Services in other countries). Maria is not working in the agency now but takes an interest in this project. The members of the team have backgrounds in social work and teaching. The team is available for

network meetings, including resource people from the network, private as well as professional, around a child or a family. They have a nice spacious room with chairs in a circle.

The network team is one of the forms of benefits from social services that citizens of Norrköping can be entitled to in situations where there are concerns about the wellbeing of a child or young person. Most often the start of an assignment for the team is a notification of concern for a child or a family to the Social Services, which means that the agency is legally obliged to start an inquiry. Citizens can also ask for support from the team. Their presentation flyer, and their text on the webpage of the municipality, says below (in my translation):

> ### The Norrköping Network team
>
> A network team prepares and manages meetings where many people are involved in a concern and may have difficulty agreeing. We work to help both individuals and civil servants talk in calm forms, where listening and reflection are important.
>
> The network team can help you when:
>
> > there is something important that has to be solved
> > several different opinions are involved, or
> > you do not see any way out.
>
> We want to help you make a good conversation with those involved,
> where we together create participation, increased understanding and hope
> for new opportunities in a difficult situation.
>
> Contact us and tell us about your problem and about who is involved. Then we'll find a time to continuing our talk and making a plan together. Then we invite everyone you want, to have a calm conversation with us in our premises.
> During the meeting, we will make sure that the dialogue flows in a fair way. If you wish, we can send notes to everyone who participated and invite for follow-up.
>
> This is an open and free service for those living in the municipality of Norrköping and we have professional confidentiality. You are welcome to contact us with your questions and concerns.

Connections in town

In the present organization (there have been changes over the years) their offices and their meeting room are in the same hallway as the executive social workers.

The team wants:

> to be next to their colleagues with other tasks within the agency
>
> to safeguard the integrity of the citizens who take part in their work
>
> to keep their own way of working intact.

The team gives statistics and fill in all forms required by the authorities. Their statistics belong to the database of the Social Services of Norrköping, but with a minimum of information on

individual citizens. In the written documentation of network meetings, the team writes who are present at the meeting, and an account of what has happened in the meeting. Everything is written in a language that all participants in the meeting can grasp. They are keen on transparence is their way of working and on using a language that their visitors find natural.

A team members explains:

> We have a different pace than the rest of the people in the hallway. We take responsibility for our own way of working, rather than what the agency is expected to perform. We accept all referrals – but meet them in our way.

Structure of a network gathering assignment

The first step in a network gathering process is planning together with the person or family entitled to the benefit. Most often the people invited to a meeting is a mixture of private and professional connections, but there is no scheme for who "should be there". As many chairs as needed are in place before the meeting.

Visits in Norrköping within the frames of this project

I have met with the team on four occasions for nine months, taking part in their regular work. I am not active in the conversations with visitors. A team member introduces me as "a retired colleague, who is interested in our work and wants to write about it."

In writing this report I sometimes hesitate in the detailed description of the workdays of my friends in Norrköping. "This is too obvious, too mundane". Yet, organizational details, like being placed in the same hallway as the colleagues with the regular social work, using the same forms to fill in, adjusting to sudden changes. All those details make meaning in the moment, enabling next dialogical step or response.

The first visit with the team

At my first visit, the original plan for that network meeting was to meet a young couple with a small child who was in custody. In the last minute, the social worker in charge pulled the brakes, as something had happened in the family that had to be sorted out before a network meeting could be arranged. Erik commented to me "we could have handled that situation in the meeting" but accepted the decision of the social worker.

Erik then decided to invite me for a consultation with a family that he was scheduled to see that morning. However, when they arrived, the family did not agree to a visitor, so Erik went back to see the family and Maria and Björn had a conversation with me.

I assume that Eric's two decisions were reflections of the intent to respect all participants in the network meeting. In addition to the family members this respect here includes the social worker in charge, who handles a balance between the two arenas of social services: legal authority and social support.

Group supervision

Maria, Björn, and I gathered with Erik for group supervision after the session he had spent with the family, a middle-aged couple and their grown-up son. We recorded our talk and here is an excerpt from our conversation.
[Before the arrival of the family, Erik had told Björn about the family and mentioned "a deathly pale man"]

> Björn: … and then I meet a deathly pale man in the hallway. And it felt as if you had a kind of tenseness facing this conversation?

> Erik: "Deathly pale" might have been too dramatic, it wasn't exactly his life that was at stake, but, for sure, there was a seriousness in the situation. And my tension was their clear expectation that, by entering this circle, sit down on these chairs, something different will happen in their lives. And they hope that I'll be part of that movement.

> Björn: They have put up the bar for themselves, so to speak.

> Erik: Of course, and that is a terrific opportunity. The movement is already there. But they 're afraid, naturally, so, the deathly paleness. And who am I to meet up to that kind of invitation? That's my tension.

> Björn: But what's the difference to all others? All the time we step into contexts like that?

> Erik: I don't know if it such a big difference? Maybe for me, more of a longing to take up this invitation from them, just because it is so outspoken. They found two weeks an unbearably long time. I'll see them on Monday again.

> Björn: You clarified that in the first session, what a despot he [the father] has been.

> Erik: And when I mentioned that, the others got anxious to tell how much love there was in the family. They really want him to be close.

I listened to the team members using – and modifying - description in everyday words. Tension and longing. Descriptions were not notions to verify or falsify, they served more to arrest a moment and then go to the next moment.

Maria: They also talked about movement, they [the family] are already in movement. I [Erik] will be able to join them in their movement. There may also be an appeal there, to travel with them.

"To travel with them" - I hear from Maria a mindset far from the expert role, far from "fitting them into a diagnostic category" as John Shotter says in the magazine Context quoted on page 3 of this paper:

For often, while trying to help clients bring their own inner lives to verbal visibility, rather than orienting ourselves towards letting their unique otherness flow through us as the otherness it is, we can all too easily violate their uniqueness by fitting them into a diagnostic category, by assuming them to be a kind of person already familiar to us. For this is what our rational forms of thought demand of us. But, this is why it is not just a technical, but an ethical issue: the very being of the other as the other they are being at stake.   Shotter, ibid. 2015

"…To "travel with" the people who have turned to you for help, to me that means a listening to, a presence with, "the very being of the other as the other they are". Shotter here goes beyond the systemic format of thinking and assumes a reality that we might, or might not, capture or under-stand, but that we nevertheless are obliged to respect in our working and being.

Later, Erik relates his questions to the family towards the end of their session.

Erik: [I asked]"You have been able to say a lot of things. Do you also feel listened to?" That was not so easy for them to say. It was more than enough for each of them just to be there with themselves. If you make a dialogical evaluation, I would say, they are not yet there. They are in the first step of reaching out.

Maria: It sounds as if there is an order, first you must try to say that which has not yet found words, at least say to one another [within the family].

My reflection, in retrospect, is that a network conversation, or as here, a family conversation, opens for many voices, for polyphony, but when is it dialogical? John Shotter has repeatedly written that what the first person says is, when it is uttered, already affected by the presence of the other person. The dialogue is there in the moment, in the tone of the voice, in looks, in gestures.

A recorded co-research meeting

Among the tasks that the team can carry out in their agency are *co-research meetings*. That means a session where the people who have had the role of clients inform the therapists or other helpers what has been helpful in the conversations, and what has not. Tom Andersen, Professor of social psychiatry in Tromsø , Norway, introduced that idea in his work with reflecting processes:

> Tom Andersen has always argued that the knowledge and expertise of patients and relatives are crucial for the understanding of mental disorders. In his work on reflecting dialogues, he always regards the persons defined as "the patients" as his co-researchers. Relatives have the same status when they are involved. It sounds simple and self-evident that you should listen to the stories told by your clients, yet it is often difficult to listen on equal terms and to involve the patients as real co-researchers.
>
> Georg Høyer in Anderson Jensen eds. (2007) p 180

This quote says, that the need for co-research meetings has to do with the fact that listening on equal terms "sounds simple and self-evident" yet involvement on equal terms is rarely achieved in practice.

Maria and Björn showed me a recording of a co-research endeavor that they had been asked to arrange in the agency. The task was initiated by the social field workers who wanted to know how their work with young people in the town was regarded by the young people themselves.

> In the recorded meeting three groups of people sat in the room:
> Two young people sat with Erik, the social field workers with Maria, and the leader of the executive unit for children and young people together with other social workers were one group. Towards the end everybody gathered in one circle and commented on the experience of the co-research conversation itself.

That co-research meeting meant that a large part of their colleagues on the child and youth unit were involved, and that the network team served the unit with an important evaluation task.

Reflection: Looking back on the first visit

There was a series of changes that morning in Norrköping. The network session that was can celled by the social worker, and the family that did not want a visitor. Right then I just noticed the ease that the team members adjusted to what happened. Later I have understood this ease and flexibility as a mark of their identity as a team. Their work takes place in an organization containing a mixture of casework traditions, emergency situations and bureaucracy. The mode of relating to, the sometimes-unpredictable work setting, is for the team to use every opening that is at hand. Sometimes that means just to quickly check with the other team members, at other times

they make open and generous comments about what's happening to whoever is present together with the team.

Second visit

Network meeting supporting a young mother

On my second visit I took part in a follow up network meeting with ten people. (As many chairs as will be needed are placed in the circle). In the meeting Erik sent around a tray with small stones, asking everybody to take a white and a black stone. Early in the meeting, he asked everybody to start with the white stone: "Mention one thing that has been accomplished since last time we met." When everybody had responded, Erik asked about the black stone: "Something that needs attention or work. "

Before the meeting, Erik had presented the joint work around this family as successful. I remember thinking "well, Erik is always encouraging". When I, after more than two hours, saw the people in the circle still in conversation with Erik about the matter, I thought to myself "Yes, this is successful, indeed!". Even at the coffee-break nobody started interacting with a phone or a pad. Behind this dedication, I thought, there is a mutual understanding that contributions from all sides matter.

The meeting involved a young mother with a nine-year-old child, where the school had expressed concerns about the child. Participants were teacher, youth worker, nurse and both parents of the mother. The father of the child, living in another town, was scheduled for a 20 minutes phone call on the time for a break at his workplace. A phone with loudspeaker was placed in the middle of the room. Erik started the phone conversation by mentioning who all were in the room. At the beginning of the call, the father talked sparsely, then more and more actively, and in half an hour he and the mother had made agreements about the next visit of the child with her dad. The fact that everybody could hear and see the reactions in one another, made the telephone call a joint moment.

To the right is a picture of the meeting arrangements: Kerstin is outside of the circle in her blue cardigan, to the right of her is the youth worker, then school nurse, mother, grandpa, grandma, two after school helpers, Erik and the teacher.
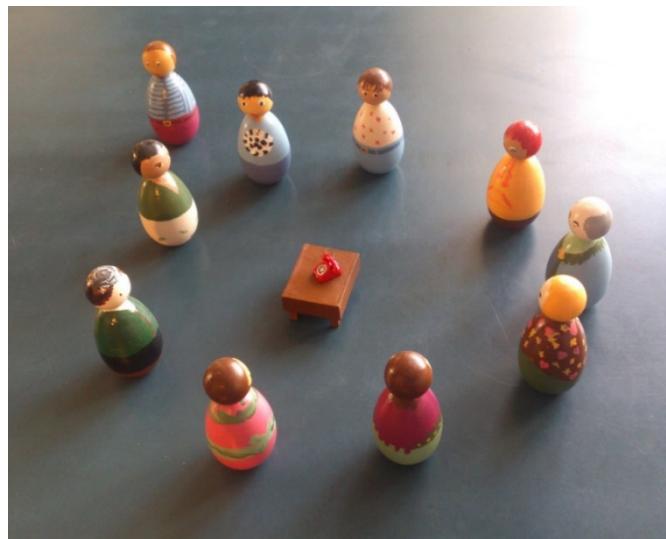
After the meeting I commented to the team that some proposals that the school would go ahead with, were eagerly received by the other participants. I guess that it was notable for the school staff to know that the other participants in the network were in favor of the changes. In my mind I compared that to a regular school/parent meeting, where the teacher wouldn't have a clue to how the agreements are received by the extended family.

A meeting with colleagues in Social Services

I was invited to take part in a presentation of the network team for three newly employed colleagues, all from the executive unit for children and young people.

The poster of a network gathering assignment on page 14 was placed on the wall. Jenny, Björn and Erik introduced the work of the team as one of the options of benefit from the agency, often starting with a notification of concern for a child or a family.

The members of the team spent a good part of the presentation telling about the mobilization phase (see poster page 14). That phase might look like a mundane routine task, however, among those invited, there might be people who never would imagine being in touch with some of the others. I the preparations, the reason for meeting these people can be clarified, both for family members, other people in the private network, and for participants from school or health care.

Team members said:

> As the start of a network assignment often is felt as a criticism or failure for the young person or the family, there might be a lot of hesitance from their side.

> When the family and the team have agreed upon who should be there in a network meeting, and how to frame the invitation, then the effort begins for the team members to invite the personal and professional participants and find a time for the meeting. There might be several phone calls back and forth to coordinate participants who must travel far or have other obstacles.

Participants asked, how long is each network job?

> It varies; everything from a few weeks to a few years.

There were also questions about violence and network:

> When threat or violence is in the picture, more work might be needed before a network meeting could take place. Sometimes a Signs of Safety work is introduced, with network meetings included when there is a wish to safeguard the situation for the future.

> Network meetings often end up with proposals about actions that one or several persons or agencies should proceed with. That is not always what happens. Many other things in life could affect whether these proposals are accomplished or not. A network meeting process is no strategic tool, rather a way of dealing with life as a whole.
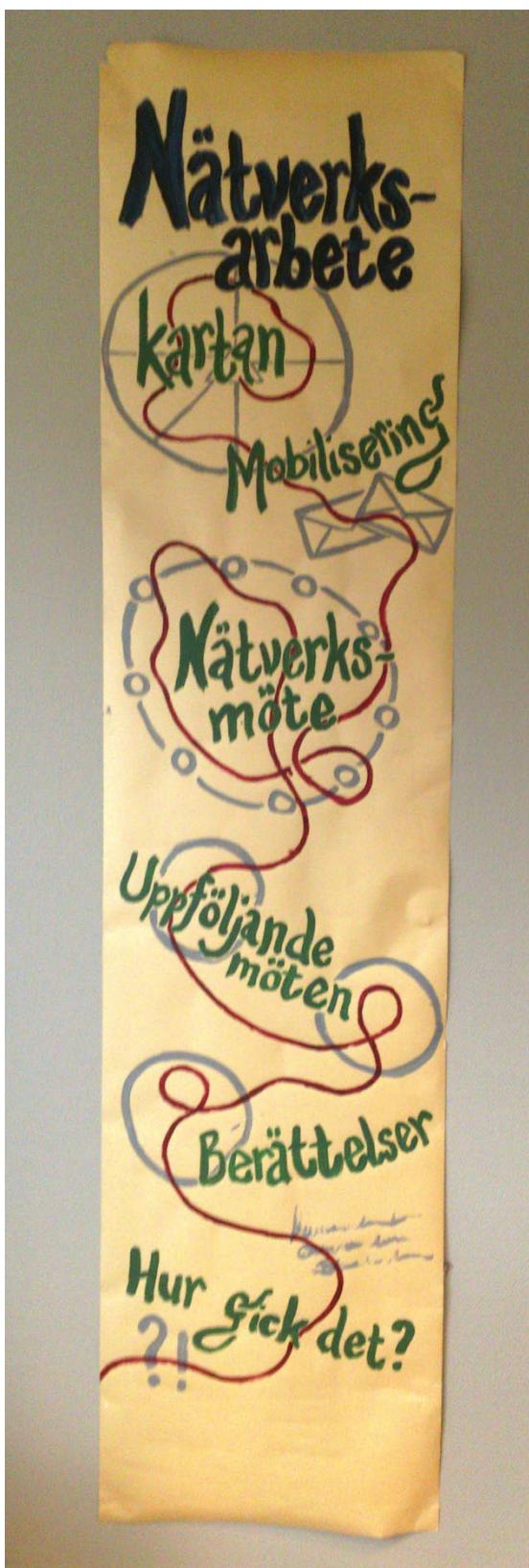
Network work

[Nätverksarbete] Network meetings as support from Social Services for a citizen or for members of a family.

Map

A network map [Kartan] made by the citizen together with a team member will guide which people to invite for a network meeting.

Mobilization

[Mobilisering] A process with calls and messages back and forth, to find reason, time, and a sense of safety for everybody invited.

Network meeting

[Nätverksmöte] Now in a circle, we see each other. A timeframe, often three hours, is set aside. A coffee break in the middle. Everyday language, reflections, suggestions.

Follow-up meetings

[Uppföljande möten] The same participants meet, or with some changes, depending on the process.

Accounts

[Berättelser] Considerations about what to tell and how to handle files in the different agencies

How did it go?

Network work is related to local evaluation practices in the agency.

A meeting with colleagues in Social Services (continued]

Why doesn't everybody work with network gathering meetings? was the next question.

> The team agreed that there is a growing interest and, for sure, it could be used much more than it is. However, voluntary participation is a requirement, and a network meeting is not a preferred choice in every setting.

´Reflection about time and timing

Listening in on these different network meetings, I searched for their similarities. The only feature I found that they have in common is a kind of timing, an intriguing coordination of sounds and silences. I found myself listening to a concerto:

> *There are the various uncoordinated sounds of participants doing the final tuning before the start, choosing a chair, small talk here and there.*

> *The mild staccato in the leaders setting the framework for the meeting.*

> *A theme introduced as an utterance from a participant is followed by responses from others. Another theme might be blending with the first or setting off in another direction.*

> *As you listen to these themes, there is a tangible softness of a short pause after an utterance, a kind of resonance, an entry for the participants and for the talker, to absorb what is just said.*

> *There might also be the duet or trio of leadership, when the leaders talk to one another, making suggestions of how to go on, or just reflecting on the present moment. Receiving and adding, as an improvisation by a few instruments until the full orchestra is in motion again, talking and listening.*

> *Cords of concluding comments forebode the end of the meeting.*

> *Unexpectedly, a solo voice adds a lively theme, others blend in. The leaders set the pace towards including all in shaping some decisive comments about a new meeting or a choice to finish, and this concerto comes to an end.*

Third visit in Norrköping

A meeting with a legal framework

When I visited Norrköping the third time, the network gathering meeting was planned with a special label, a SIP meeting.

SIP means *Coordinated Individual Plan* and is regulated both in the Social Services Act and the Health and Medical Services Act. The intention is coordination of activities where both the local social agencies and the regional health services are involved. A citizen has rights to get a SIP plan established, and professionals are obliged to respond to a call to SIP meeting. There is a form to fill in for the meeting and everybody involved has rights to be informed of the outcome of the meeting.

The SIP form contains boxes for:

> The task to be done.
> Name of the person in charge of the task,
> Time for follow-up,
> Sign for approval,
> Person responsible for follow up.

In the form there is no line for backdrop or intention, or how the target person views the course of action.

When a member of the Network gathering team is responsible for invitation and follow up of a SIP-meeting they add a form for:

> Contact information for the people concerned
> and for the executive social worker,
> Boxes for Where do we begin, and
> What is our next step.

Together with the citizen, the team member also adds an account about views of the situation and requests. In the follow up form, that will be sent to all participants after the meeting, the team member and the citizen together add a written account on views about the outcome (sometimes in very small letters, as there isn't much room on the form).

In my understanding, this way of handling a rigid format is another example of "both-and". The team is both respecting the legal requirements and the experiences of the people involved in the matter.

A network meeting concerning a teenager

The network meeting was led by Erik and Jenny. As I mentioned before, participation of a health care representative was expected. This time, shortly before the SIP meeting the team learned that the psychiatrist was prevented from coming, so there would not be a formal SIP. The team decided to have a network meeting anyway, for the rest of the network to have this possibility of giving support.

The meeting concerned a teenage girl with a history of low esteem and school difficulties. The people gathered were the girl, both her parents, her boyfriend, a sister of the girl's mother, an older brother of the girl, her teacher and a special ed. teacher. Erik and Jenny took turns in facilitating, and warmly and openly shared alternative ideas about what to do next, at that stage of the meeting.

As previously, I had been introduced as a retired colleague taking an interest in the network team with the intention to write about them. However, sensing the burden that was expressed, in words and in silences, I felt that I wanted to share that the meeting had moved me. I said something about being a mother and a grandmother, that I was reminded of good times and times of trouble, and I was thankful that they had allowed me to take part in this talk. That was no exaggeration or just politeness. The silence around a silent teenager raised my memories of tense

and painful watchfulness. I felt no need to talk about those instances, and I felt as if the participants received my comments.

No expert owns the language of this concern

After the meeting we, Erik, Jenny and I, recorded our reflections for me to use in this project.

> Kerstin: I thought about what happened right at the end, about the evaluation, "did we do the evaluation, or didn't we?" and then you arrived at "well, let's do it now". Open agreements, no little signs between the leaders, quite openly in the context.

> Erik: What did it feel like for you [Jenny] we just stood there a bit confused. Was it OK?

> Jenny: Yes, it was OK, but, that's because now I do see a point of doing like that. With transparency in the conversation, you can also make use of something like that.

> Kerstin: That's what I meant.

> Jenny: So, it doesn't feel awkward.

> Erik: Even this "help text", all this talk in between: "who is fixing the coffee", "shall we take a break", all that talk, that's also method. It's fun. You note it at times in our gang, sometimes I'm annoyed with it. We sometimes speak as if we had a camera on, like we have now.

> Jenny: You get quite a bit of training, you don't just talk to the one you talk to, you talk so that the others also hear what you talk about. It turns into a kind of non-[conversation].

> Kerstin: Oh, I didn't notice that!

> Jenny: I mean, for me as new here, it's great, I kind of come into it and kind of practice noticing things. [Now I do see a point in doing it].It doesn't have to be dead serious, to turn on that way. But, of course, if you have done it for quite some time, I guess it might be annoying at times.

> Erik: That's what I think is so much fun, reflecting conversations in this manner, that it is so close to everyday language. That also makes it inclusive. It's including for those who are sitting there, important things, it's their things, we're talking about. It's no diagnose language, I can talk about it, at home, and in school. There's no expert who owns the language of this concern!

That last phrase "No expert owns the language of this concern" echoed in my mind for days thereafter. That was also what we talked about at my fourth visit, how the visibility of the network of relationships gives energy and discernment in troubled situations.

The periphery in the middle

One thing I noticed in the two network conversations I listened to in this project, and was told as frequently occurring in network meetings, was something like this:

> Towards the end of the meeting, the question comes up "would it be a good idea for us to meet again?" Often the most eager advocate for another meeting is an aunt, a youth

worker, or someone else, that does not seem to be the heaviest stake holder in the situation. Why? I asked Erik, and he responded. "These are the ones who rarely would be informed in any other way."

Erik went on explaining that the immediate family members have more channels for information than the relatives or friends. The authorities are legally obliged to keep the family informed. The school, the social agencies and health services have their files. Grandpa, auntie, youth worker are people who normally don't get informed about what happens in the troubling situation.

A network gathering process takes place at a tough time for tough reasons. The people who take center stage might be overloaded or too enmeshed to respond to the question "What next?" When grandma or a youth worker are the ones suggesting a new meeting, they tend to add energy in the process.

Changes in focus along the road of this study

So far, I notice several shifts in my own focus of the study: In planning this project, I was focusing on the work of the team; what do they do, and how do they keep their enthusiasm through the years? Now, in the meetings, I notice their creative and sensitive manners in relating to *all* people involved, including the organizational structures.

> For example, as mentioned earlier, sometimes a network meeting is included in a "Signs of Safety" work, the team is engaged in regular evaluation practices of the agency, and at times adding a perspective through co-research initiatives (https://www.signsofsafety.net/). When the team members interact with the various people and agencies that are relevant for the citizens they offer support to, new knowledge might be created for everybody involved. As a society, I think, we are in need for a language that is in sync with the practices we find helpful and including.

The original title of the project included the phrase:

> shared experiences in network teams within social welfare services.

The same title in this report says:

> shared experiences in a network gathering team within social welfare services.

The change from "teams" to "a team" reflect an awareness in my mind that surfaced after some time. My interest in the work of network teams somehow made me think that what I met in the Norrköping team would be representative for other teams, at least in Sweden, or at least within public social services! However, at the time of project planning, I was not aware that the sensitivity to the *unique* reasons for gathering a *specific* team, makes inferences between different teams difficult.

The addition of "gathering" came since I learnt that other network teams added that specification to their presentation of their work. I guess it helps to distinguish this horizontal process of creation of every unique network, from than any kind of strategic professional gathering named network.

My initial focus on" the choice in the moment" had more consequences for this project than I had foreseen. There were no general conclusions to be expected in the study, rather a gradual acquaintance with a creative therapeutic work in living contact and adjustment to practicalities in an actual situation. I have found myself in a situation that John Shotter describes:

> Once we accept that we do not live in an already-made world, but in an indeterminate world that we can make determinate in countless different ways, then it becomes clear that prior to any thoughts about the difficulty or difficulties we face, we need to formulate the subject matter of our inquiry, initially, at least, in the shared common-sense terms available to us in our ordinary, everyday language – for initially at least, we need to find it intelligible, open to our explorations of its meaning for us.

> Shotter, J. (2016) p. 167

Trust and human dignity, the Danish professor of ethics, K E. Løgstrup

One of the questions that have stayed in me throughout this project is: How can I understand the *trust* that the team has in the process of a network gathering meeting? And, the trust that the *families*, and the people around them, have in the team? In the conversations with the team, I tended to refer to the Danish professor of Ethics, Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1905 – 1981). As his work is not so well known, I want to say a little more about it in this context.

The Danish child psychiatrist Søren Hertz in his book Børne- og ungdomspsykiatri – nye perspektiver og uanede muligheder [Eng.: Child- and adolescent psychiatry – new perspectives and unimagined possibilities] refers to the work of Løgstrup. Hertz sketches a bio-psycho-social conceptual model for child and adolescent psychiatry. That model emphasizes the worth of assembling concrete case reports, rather than digital accounts, to sort out that which will generate possibilities that are not immediately visible. In this context, Hertz claims inspiration from Løgstrup, quoting:

> Through the trust which a person either shows or asks of another person he or she surrenders something of his or her life to that person. Therefore, our existence demands of us that we protect the life of a person who has placed his or her trust in us…(Løgstrup 1997 p 17 in Hertz 2011 p 64)

> Trust is not of our own making, it is given. Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts her or himself into that person's hand either by showing or claiming trust (Løgstrup ibid. p 18).

Both John Shotter and Nora Bateson address questions of lived life rather than staying within the familiar psychological turf of knowledge. Løgstrup has given a lot of attention to trust and what happens when trust is in need. In our conversations of what matters in the work of the network team we found those ideas significant, and I here give a brief summary of what we talked about.

In his book *The ethical demand*, [originally published in Danish in 1957, title: Den etiske fordring], Løgstrup is talking about life as a gift. Life is given, in all its complexity. However,

many obstacles in life, and in human endeavors at the largest possible scale, have to do with decisions that are made in oblivion or denial of that given-ness. *Given* in Løgstrup's thinking is not just given in the sense of a givenness, a pre-condition, the Danish word in the original is "skænket" which means given as a gift.

> The ethical demand consists of two elements. First, it receives its content from a fact, from a person to person relationship which can be demonstrated empirically, namely, that one person's life is involved with the life of another person.
>
> The point of the demand is that one is to care for whatever in the other person's life that involvement delivers into his or her hands.
>
> Second, the demand receives its one-sidedness from the understanding that a person's life in an ongoing gift, so that we will never be in a position to demand something in return to what we do.
>
> That life has been given to us is something that cannot be demonstrated empirically, it can only be accepted in faith – or else denied."

(ibid p 123)

In the preface by Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre, editors of an English translation of *The ethical demand*, they comment that Levinas' concept of "the other" is close to Løgstrup's "demand". Both authors talk about the other as human being rather than friend or stranger, family or citizen. Also, both claim that it is not possible to know in advance what will, or will not, be required of me in relation to "the other". The third aspect that Levinas and Løgstrup have in common is that the demand or command cannot be referred to in a rule or set of rights, as it, in the human experience, is more fundamental than any of these (ibid p. xxxiv).

Giving trust such a main place underlines how we as human beings are connected and depending upon each other for our wellbeing. Thereby, something is also said about what happens when trust is not received:

> To trust, however, is to lay oneself open. This is why we react vehemently when our trust is "abused", as we say, even though it may have been only in some inconsequential matter. Abused trust is trust that is turned against the person who does the trusting. The embarrassment and danger to which we are subjected by the abuse is bad enough. But even worse is the fact that our trust was scorned by the other person. For the other person to have been able to abuse it, our trust must simply have left him or her cold… And it is a question whether it is not the indifference thus manifested toward us in his or her abuse of our trust, more than the unpleasant consequences of the abuse itself, which evokes our bitter reaction (ibid p. 9).

The vulnerable position is that one has dared to come forward in the hope of being accepted and then is not. Not only the fact that the trust is not received by the other, is a distress for the trusting person, but also the realization that the trust has left the other person cold.

The families who are seen by the network team, have often had a lot of exposure to examinations and evaluations by professionals. In helping professions, with the best intentions, we are trained in a neutral and objective stance. In the excerpts of our discussion below, Jenny describes that these families might end up in a "weird confusion", a position where you don't very easily trust the next suggestion from authorities or professional helpers.

Fourth visit in Norrköping Evaluation of the project

Conversation with the team, Björn, Jenny and Erik

Among the preconditions of this project is to evaluate what it has meant, both for participants and for the author. When I read the transcripts from our last meeting in Norrköping, I noticed that both the team members and I had evaluated our collaboration. I decided to make excerpt of that conversation my project evaluation. It took place on May 25, 2018.

> Kerstin: I have two questions for you, one about network meetings as such and then one to talk about our own meetings. I want to start with the first one.
>
>> When I have tried to write about what we have said before, what I have seen and so on, I still don't catch: *from* the moment where the issue of 'may be a network meeting', is brought up, *to* the hour when you actually sit there, what is that like? What could it look like, in different circumstances?
>
> Björn: You want to get the tricks of the trade, kind of?
>
> Kerstin: Both the practical tricks, but also, how come that this particular situation gives a sign that it might be fit for a network task?
>
> Erik: I guess everything is fit for a network task. How could you respond to that kind of question?
>
> Björn: I get two ideas. I am thinking in two steps, important for myself, when I start up a network enterprise. But I guess you have other…
>
> Erik: You seem to be all set, so please get started. Meanwhile we might think of some other perspective.
>
> Björn: Even if some professional has pictured a network assignment as a good plan, that does not mean that parents and young people have that idea and agree to it. So, for me there are two steps. First to make a phone call, let's say to the mother, and ger her trust that maybe we can meet, and then, I have invited myself to the family kitchen table.
>
> There, in a few minutes, it's about getting the family to think: Well, this sounds OK . He seems to know what he is talking about and he seems nice, so "we lay our lives in his hands" Something like that. Actually, I am fascinated every time that they dare, in that short time when we meet and talk about it.
>
> Erik: As you say this, I'm thinking that there is a pressing need of this big joint conversation. You see a family, or a young person, there is a worry of some kind. Then you plant this idea. All these people who are worried, could sit together. "Yes, what if we could sit together?" And here's one who can make that happen. – Yes, we fix the invitation and we have a good room for that. " You say that it's possible?" "At last", many say, "somebody does it!"

Björn [They say] "Why has nobody told us?"

Erik: The pressing need: "Is there somebody who can light our camp fire?"

Jenny: I think that in these families, often there has been, for quite some time, a kind of weird confusion. About what happens, and why things are changing, and "who does what", and "how come", and "who all are actually talking to each other?"

So many things move around, and they themselves are often in crisis, sometimes longstanding, so in their minds there's also confusion.

Then, to be offered some outline and support . We are pretty good at asking how this conversation could be as good as possible for those concerned. To generate confidence by structuring what to expect in this context, to calm and safeguard.

…

Kerstin: I am fascinated. I had a quite "empty" question, as it was, although we have talked so much, this [what happens in the start of a network meeting process] was not yet there. Then, in a few minutes, you get three very different aspects, doorways into the reflexivity that's there from the very beginning. That the people who are going to be part of this [process] are so involved from the very beginning.

When I try to describe to others why I see you, I often get the answer, "Oh yes, we have something of that kind in our place." But, apparently, that's not the case, they have something much more "top down" regulated. There is not this entrance from the people's own concerns, from their own confusion.

Björn: I want to add to what Jenny shares about confusion. That which comes from above, as you say, decisions that are made somewhere and implemented in the family, gets incomprehensible. We hear repeatedly about interventions, without the family understanding whether or why they begin or stop. People who enter into their lives and disappear, seemingly for no reason. In fact, the confusion continues when we are there [with them], but, then it's understandable.

Kerstin: I have written something similar, then I realized that I had no evidence.

Björn: We can supply!

Erik: I like Jenny's picture of the concern, the inner chaos and the outside chaos. I just want to try out a picture, a metaphor, that I got from there. I thought, that if you as a family are in crisis or chaos, you're not getting hold of your own resources . Not only mental resources, but also which people are my resources and my own inner resources, you can have difficulty getting hold of them.

In the same way, I fancied, for instance, if you have your herd of reindeer all over the landscape, or your cattle out in the forest, you don't know how much you have there. Not until somebody says "I can bring them together. We can take them into this pen, so we can count them in and see how many calves we have and so on, so we know what we have to work with. That was the picture. Then I thought, are we shepherds then, or?

…

Kerstin: This is so fascinating! When you are to start an inquiry, when there has come a notification of concern or something, the family is the target. Then you [the inquirer] don't think of the life that they have had, with all those things that have made them confused. Then for them to get an assessment, I guess that turns into yet another confusion?

Jenny: And I am thinking that we are in a context with our hard-working social workers, have they had a chance to, with these families, where they are, to tell them about this assessment? What is the base for it, how come the agency has made this decision, on top of that the confusion and crisis in the family? And we know what it is like to meet people in stress.

Erik: I am thinking of the movement from the question to when we sit in this room, that which in network language is called mobilization. And it sounds as if it is quite a job, and of course it is, to call and invite and so on, but there is no resistance in that work. The only resistance is a matter of logistics, to find the right day or time etc. I never come across somebody who does not want to come. On the contrary, people populate this room all by themselves. It's a pull, a flow in, it's just a matter of finding out how we get to the same place at the same time. In the beginning it might have been an effort to lift the receiver and persuade somebody, but, it's not like that anymore.

Björn: I come back to this, we have become incredible sellers, I think, to persuade people, there is something in the voice, we are so convinced ourselves that this is good.

Erik: But I, they just come and ask.

Björn: You ask them to call you.

Erik: Well.

Jenny: The families, I get more often the reaction: "Thank goodness, plenty of time for us" than that it would be difficult. Possibly, "you can take a break, can't you? It might be hard to sit down for so long." It's more like "Then there is a chance to sort things out."

Björn: Yes, we offer a tasty product, but we are also good at presenting it, and I thought about another thing that we have not mentioned here. The function of the network map there on the kitchen table. That's good.

[The network map to the right is a sketch of how I place the people of my network in relation to myself. When I have used it in supervision groups, I have always made my own map as well. Often with surprising results, never the same as last time.]
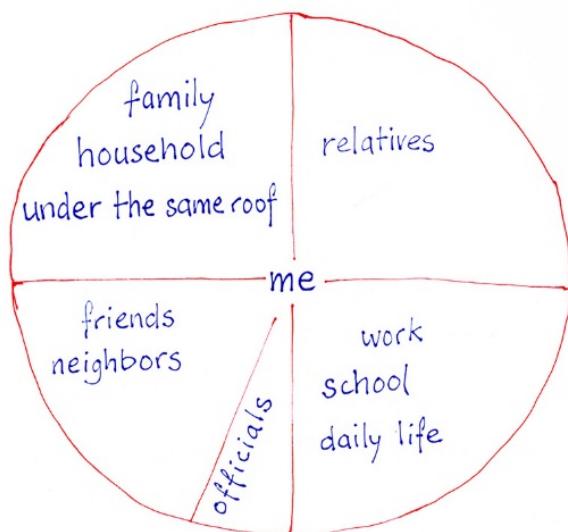
Conversation with the team, Björn, Jenny and Erik about the project (continued)

Erik: [Talking about the map that gets so interesting on the kitchen table:] That mother, you know, that I worked together with once, sitting there [Erik points to the side]. She said: 'What, that network map. Now they are here!' She was amazed that they all suddenly were present in the room. To get somebody from the map into a real room. That's a cool transition!

Kerstin: Yes, indeed! Oh, I haven't come to that in my writing. I have brought that into the presentation of the flow of the work, from the books about network. I had not thought about it concerning your invitation of a network work, but of course, that's how you do it!

Björn: Yes, it makes the networks of these people come to life for themselves. They have not seen it like that before.

Kerstin: Yes, Thank you. I think that I have got a response on my first question.

Erik: Check!

Kerstin: Well, we have met, what was that like for you? I know for my own part, that I have got this chance to write, and got this chance to come here, but that's selfish, so I don't know how to ask what it was like for you?

Björn: We have got the chance to be written about. That's big, I think.

Erik: There are many aspects, I'll start with one that I came to think about. I'll start there. We had an exchange with Olga, who works in Moscow, is network worker there. We had an exchange a few years ago.

Kerstin: I looked at a video recording about it.

Erik: She was here and observed us in meetings and we talked with one another afterwards. That was also a collaboration with somebody from the outside looking in. Then it was also the aspect that the language was an exciting barrier. Could you understand the process without language? What happened then was cool. You are so conscious of that you are observed, you know that somebody is interested, is curious about the process, maybe about

what's behind processes. That makes you yourself conscious about what processes you participate in. I think that awareness influences the processes and the people we work with. Then I think in second order cybernetics, the observing systems. That which turned so real, just because I am observed, that will influence me, and the systems I am participant observer in, and vice versa. That's second order cybernetics in practice, and it really developed the work with the families and the networks, to know that somebody is there and is going to ask about it and think about it. It's always lifting a bit.

Björn: Yes, Kerstin must have influenced even the other people in the room, sort of. Can we ask her to stay? Maybe, that's not possible. I haven't had any visit by Kerstin in any of my meetings, but you have.

Jenny: It's always so exciting to take part in reflections from somebody, in retrospect, sort of, when somebody has been sitting there, listening, looking and absorbing. It has been giving, growing a couple of centimeters, by having had that observation from outside.

Björn: I think this is really something. Kerstin is someone in this world and she knows everyone worth knowing, sounds like. That she is so wide eyed fascinated over our everyday work, that's big for me.

Erik: I swing between thinking: "It's something that she has misunderstood" and being awfully proud. That's really what it's like. Do you recognize that, Björn?

Björn: You bet!

Kerstin: Then I want to take a turn towards Løgstrup, as I have not talked about that. His way of writing is not easy to follow. However, trust and distrust, shame and shaming experiences, [concepts that L. deals with] are echoes from my years in supervision of social work. And when, you can be restored from that, when you can bridge over something that has been filled of shame, lots of good things tend to happen. What I have seen here, in the network meeting, is for instance school staff relating differently compared to regular school-parent meetings that I have experienced.

If you then side with John Shotter, who really emphasizes perception, as Maria reminded me about a YouTube clip [see reference list] where he somewhere encourages the listener not to move so fast in that which happens, but to walk around in that landscape for a while and receive impressions that you are able to go on with in some way. That fits with [what this woman said about] the network map when people sit listening when someone else receives a question and responds.

Björn: Yes, distrust and trust, shame and restoration, that's what we are working with, a movement.

Erik: But Løgstrup says that human beings need human beings. To be needed, to be counted on, that is important. Not to do that, is wrong, a wrong done by all humanity, to count people off. You should count them in, to be counted on. To be somebody for somebody else. That isn't something that you can construct. As you were telling about the meeting last night. Glances and feelings, as in the kind of pressure cooker that a [network] circle can be, a moment of recognition that you mean something for somebody else. It's possible to create that. It's thrilling. You have go get going with Løgstrup, so that he turns more distinct. He sounds good.

Kerstin: One thing that he [Løgstrup] is saying, and that I agree to, and that is not said everywhere, is that what is offensive is not only if someone has said no to you, or been violent, but also, if what I bring out, when I dare to show trust, leaves the other person cold. That is offensive. You give something of yourself, and the other person doesn't get moved. Much of what is presented as a professional and neutral approach is instead felt as coldness by the other person.

[The meeting] *Let's meet, let's create* was very meaningful for me, indeed. And just to see Nora [Bateson] there. I have studied Bateson [Gregory] since so many years, and I also listened to her together with you in Årsta. [A seminar a couple of years earlier] Then she was here with you. Her ideas about columns of knowledges, separate academic hierarchies, and that our planet needs collaboration from several sources for survival and development were crucial, I think.

[At *Let's meet…*] I also got to present local history and relational language from premodern times in front of an audience with open faces and keen interest. That was new to me. It was fun!

Björn: It's great that you could benefit from us, not just having done research on us, gone home and written something and left us with a sigh of relief. We have enjoyed having you here and all your exuberant comments, all that you have "seen" in us, we have seen a little clearer, and so we have given you a little more energy, with new meetings with interesting people, it's incredible, great.

Erik: I'm a romanticist, and idealist in many ways, at the same time I'm in practice, I want to work, I don't like to sit dreaming and writing. But, I cannot imagine anything more boring than work in social services and call meetings. It sounds so boring. Therefore, these meetings must be something else. What's that? It's a shepherd's job in Kairos, on the border of Eon, it's Second order Cybernetics, it's the Swirls of Time that are at stake, and that's what I think about my work. Although, we can't go around daily talking like that, but sometimes we do. Not everybody does that. I am so happy that somebody has that way of looking at our job, in the depth and the surface of what we are dealing with.

Jenny: Sometimes, when you've had that kind of week, when you really question what you are doing, it's ordinary, you come here, do your thing, get frustrated at organizational stupidity, it's easy to fall into the mindset of "work in social services and call meetings", what's that. It's so good to lift your eyes and look at another horizon, to fuel the meaning that is there still. You go there with your spade in the ground, then it's so nice when a shower of rain comes from above, sort of.

Björn: "work in social services and call meetings"

Kerstin: I guess that it's both a tool and a difficulty, not to have a special title, no licensing procedure for it… it's rather something like a musician. A musician cannot go around improvising all the time, but, once the music is there, when all is in place, then the improvisation is there, [Kerstin reads "The concerto" from page 16 in this paper.]

Kerstin: That's what you do.

Björn: We do. Yes.

Erik: Catch the rhythm, yes. What a description!

The choice in the moment: the network team and Harlene Anderson

In October 2016 I welcomed dr Harlene Anderson, one of the founders of the Houston Galveston Institute, at a workshop arranged by the Stockholm Family Therapy Association. Members of the Norrköping network team were also present at the workshop, as they have been inspired by her work over the years.

I read to the workshop participants some notes I had written in 1989 as I spent a semester at the institute [then called the Galveston Family Institute], mentioned in the beginning of this essay. There I had met Harlene Anderson, Harry Goolishian and Sue Levin and other inspiring people. I had written some notes after my first ten days in Galveston:

> "When we talk about patients, we should talk about them in such a way, that they any time could enter into the conversation",

> ″One goal in therapy is to provide a context for an increasing sense of agency"

> "A person in therapy should be permitted to act competently rather than to be educated to be competent".

When I, before the Stockholm workshop in 2016, found these lines among the archive files of my computer, I was deeply moved by the significance of the concepts I had caught on to, just by noticing what was said and done around me in those few days. An eagerness to learn for my part, for sure, but most of all a sign of the atmosphere at the Institute being tremendously open and generous. Even a newcomer from overseas was invited in a way that allowed the core of their approach to be visible!

The same kind of openness, all these notes, could be said of the network gathering team in Norrköping.

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