

Storytelling to the group and group recreation of the story / Récit d'un conte à un groupe et recréation du conte par le groupe¹

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Resumo: A narração de contos pode ser considerada como uma construção de grupo, já que tanto vários autores, pessoas e grupos quanto narradores e receptores contam e recontam os contos à procura de uma recriação do mito original. Este artigo descreve, em inglês e francês, o processo da narração e recriação grupal do conto desenvolvido ao longo de uma oficina com um grupo pequeno de canadenses de cultura bilingüe. O conto grupal provém do exercício dos papéis narrativos feitos por cada membro do grupo e da montagem dos seus relatos individuais, linguagens e culturas. Duas observações foram feitas: 1) A dinâmica do grupo ensinou que os participantes desenvolveram, ao longo da recriação coletiva dos contos individuais, um tipo de comunicação “fraternal”; 2) As mensagens culturais dos contos do grupo e da história de um participante canadense anglófono, escrita meses depois da oficina, integraram suas próprios mensagens culturais canadenses à mensagem do “conto indutivo” contado pelo narrador, proveniente da sua própria cultura latino-americana.

Abstract: Storytelling can be considered a group shared construction since several authors – groups and individuals, narrators and listeners – tell and retell stories, recreating a new myth from the original one. This paper describes in English and French the process of storytelling and group story recreation, that developed in a workshop that was conducted with a small Canadian bilingual cultural group. The group story results from developing storytelling roles in every group member and from joining their individual stories, languages and cultures. In this experience two observations were made: 1) The group dynamics showed along the group recreation of the individual stories, that participants forged a significant “fraternal” kind of communicative style between them. 2) The cultural messages in the Canadian group stories and the post-workshop story of a Canadian Anglophone participant, integrated the own Canadian cultural messages to the Latin American storyteller’s trigger story brought from his own Latin American culture.

¹ This article summarizes and discusses the workshop held by Dr. Julio E. Correa at the 10th Conference of l’Association des art-thérapeutes du Quebec, held at Montreal, Canada, April 30/ May 2, 1993: “La métaphore racontée/ Metaphorically speaking”. A brief communication of it: “La narración de cuentos grupal”, was reported by him at the Fifth Internacional Seminar: “Estudios Comparados: Argentina y Canadá: Tendiendo Redes para el Intercambio” [Mesa “Tecnologías y nuevos lenguajes narrativos”], held at Centro de Estudios Argentino-Canadienses, Buenos Aires (2004).

Introduction

This paper delves into Canadian/Latin American studies from a different viewpoint than the ones that compare cultures as different systems, sustaining a methodology and description of facts that try to establish distinctions and similarities: our article is based on principles that organize the compounds of a system in a stable fashion that permits continuous interaction as well the preservation of structures and functions (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Myths, stories and storytelling behave as common threads in cultural systems that allow a recurring story to be followed coherently by the narrative themes that are interspersed through different cultures, nations and regions in their particular adjustments (Sakya; Griffith, 1980). The aim of studying narrative along paths of natural evolution through use by cultures, individuals and groups is to increase our understanding of how such “bridging” is accomplished, as well as to learn about clues leading us towards knowledge of integration rather than alienation of cultures in embattled “silos”. This is a very relevant issue in relation to present-day cultures that agglomerate as a result of migration, commercial trade, economic globalization and cultural change.

As I was invited to conduct a workshop [WS] on storytelling at Montreal, Canada and my public was composed of bicultural participants, this article centers on describing the stories that enclose – as china boxes – all the personal and group stories that unfolded during the WS since the phase of story selection (my own “Argentinean” story), the narrated story, the Canadian group story recreation and a Canadian participant post-workshop story (Neil Hobbs). An ethnographic framework is provided to help define the role of storytelling in culture and to facilitate further application to educational and therapeutic group research.

Group storytelling

Oral transmission of stories from generation to generation may be linked to development of some higher brain functions in

the human – viz. imagination and inventiveness – (Popper; Eccles, 1982). Such functions play a primary role in socio-cultural evolution, and may derive from the rituals and belief systems that evolved from hunter-gatherer cultures as well as those of pastoralist/slavers (Propp, 1980). The sum of such narratives thus comprises a reservoir of human universal and regional cultural behaviors, together with information about past events. It may be seen as a “fabric” of narrative comprising present, recent or remote events, that fulfills and feeds back “family” and “social-cultural” narrative storage as well the practice of communicative functions (Correa, 1990; 2003).

Within this biologic and socio-cultural framework, individuals and groups will construct unique entities comprised of their own individual memories; those of their family of origin and social group; and cultural myths that belong to these latter sources. This amalgam of sources leads to a wide range of narrative themes. Group story productions streaming from such sources either emerge naturally as folklore (Propp, 1980) or are to be drawn out from diverse group settings, which may be educational (Ogbu, 1980) and therapeutic (Correa, Gonzalez; Weber, 1991).

In the therapeutic context the narration usually starts with a story told by a group member that evolves over interactive emotional experiences with other members in order to trigger the “group story”. The constituted group story then catalyses a series of related themes from group participants that behave as an axis or “proto-myth” (Granel, 1982). Further stories will develop around this axis in different forms that allow thematic recombination by the entire group. Thus, the group is challenged to construct a narrative represented by contributions actively supplied by all of its members, rather than the traditional pattern that tends to represent the interests of those with particular narrative rhetoric skills, as is the case of “storytellers”, who are often recognized for their narrative skills but – literally – insist on telling “just one side of the story”. Hence, in a storytelling environment of this fashion that gives participants an equal chance to tell their different versions, there is the potential to tell, combine and recombine stories and to

allow individuals and groups to tailor their constructed narrative according to their personal and socio-cultural needs as well as their professional backgrounds (Correa et al., 1992).

Method

The WS² followed a serial step scheme of storytelling known as a Group storytelling method, based on a communicative skills learning process developed from previous research in a variety of group settings (Correa; Doval, 1989; Correa et al., 1992; Correa, 2003), and following a well-described group process of storytelling/story-recreation (Correa, 2002): I. The story-telling session performed with an educational aim usually employs a story or collection of stories previously selected for the particular issues or interests to be worked on (Rubin, 1979). In this particular instance the story chosen dealt with the “bereavement” issues promoted in the WS title: “Story telling to the bereaved group and story recreation by the group” (Correa, 1993a). In the selection procedure the personal involvement of the workshop coordinator would also need to be considered, especially in the framework of this publication that delves into the story construction process linking Latin American culture with Canadian culture [“An Argentinean Story, by Julio E. Correa”];// II. Individual stories: II.1 Each group participant tells a brief story introducing him/herself as a “third person” and II.2 Comments on the story told by the storyteller;// III. The storyteller tells a summary of those group member stories by stringing together analogies between them;// IV. Here the group recreates the story by playing a “drama story” that is conducted by the storyteller;// V. Every participant takes the “storyteller’s place” by telling their own “group drama story” versions to the group;// VI. Group members are encouraged by the WS coordinator to write post-WS story versions or comments on the group story experience. Because there was an intention to seek an outflowing of the group’s

² This WS was held at the 10^o Colloque de l’Association des art-thérapeutes du Québec: “Metaphorically Speaking” [April 30-May 2, 1993], Montréal, Québec, Canada.

literary production for public destinations beyond the original group setting, this paper includes post-WS comments – in the form of a “story” – from only one of the four attendees that could be reached by the author: his comments sent one year later than the WS followed an intensive and uninterrupted correspondence over twelve months on different aspects of the paper that was rewritten many times, turning N. H. into a co-author.

Stories

I. Selection of the story

I.1 Trigger story: “The Columber” (*Le Colomme*), recreated version by Julio E. Correa over a story by Dino Bruzzati: “El Colombre”.

This story tells of a seaman who from childhood was selected as the victim of a voracious sea monster – the “columber” – while he voyaged as a boy with his father, who was a sea captain. The columber appeared suddenly in the wake of the ship in which they were travelling. In order to prevent the boy from falling prey to the dreaded monster, his father cut short the journey and the two of them disembarked. The father gave strict instructions to the boy that he should on no account travel by sea ever again.

Nevertheless, when the boy grew up and his father had died, he took to the sea, clearly determined to demonstrate to himself and others that he could master his own fears and show that he had the same qualities of seamanship that his father had possessed. Throughout every voyage that the man ever made thereafter, though, he was pursued unrelentingly by the columber, which seemed tirelessly dedicated to such a lifelong hunt. Of course, this fearful pursuit only served to drive the man to take unavoidable risks that he would not normally have taken and spurred him on to become master of his destiny upon the ocean. After a lifetime, the boy became an old man and decided

finally that he had to confront the columber. One day he took a small rowing boat and rowed alone away from his ship. After only a short time he found the columber, vast and glistening, emerging from the water beside him. Awestruck, he heard the columber address him in a gentle and melodious voice: "O man, at long last have I found you! What a long chase this has been! You have never understood the purpose of my pursuit, but now, finally, I have a chance to tell you...Years ago I was entrusted by the King of the Sea to give you his most precious gift. The King had watched you for many years, even as a boy, sailing on board the ship that was commanded by your beloved father!" So saying, the columber opened his huge mouth and unfolded his long tongue towards the man. At its tip the man saw the largest and most beautiful pearl that he had ever seen: "This is the Pearl of the Seven Seas" said the columber, "known to give to those who earn it, fame and recognition, lifelong friendship and love, fortune and power, wisdom and fulfilment of every kind, calm and courage in the worst turmoil... and also the peace of spirit. At last may you enjoy now the peace of the spirit to die. You deserve it from coming to grapple with me at last! Good bye, old man!"

And, as the old man entered a deep calm sleep, the Columber, with a thrash of his enormous tail, threw himself into the air and seconds later re-entered the deep green waters of the sea to disappear, forever.

This performance was closed in the dark to the sound of Debussy's symphonic poem "*La Mer*".

I.2 An Argentinean story. A biobibliographical report by Julio Enrique Correa.

The fact that I am a Latin American professional who conducted a workshop in Canada on storytelling gives special interest to take into consideration the weigh of such cultural appartenance in the selection of the story that is to carry an intercultural message acting as a communicational input with Canadians, otherwise masked under the bibliotherapeutic aims. The story is by an Italian author, hinting at an important cultural

source of Argentinean identity as well as my family's own. Other connections must be searched in the professional and sociocultural environment that I underwent at the time I selected this story. In the first place, at the same workshop of the Association des art-thérapeutes du Québec held at Montréal in 1993, I also reported a paper over the use of storytelling and drawings, including the body profile design to help children with unfavourable prognosis cancer, to cope with the disease (Correa, 1993b): I took such technique from the paintings on the floor that were used as banners to claim about disappeared people during the 1977-1983 Argentinean dictatorship. Another significant paper related to this one was the one in which I described the group storytelling method, also from a workshop experience held at the end of 1991 [in this case the group story told about the challenges to build an "Argentinean new story" resistant to submitting to the opportunistic political version of the global economic model associated to President Menem, signaling a time-wise anticipated social "death" as that one portrayed by a renown poem by Garcia Lorca, that here seemed to foretell a real massacre occurred in the next immediate future (Correa, 2002³). It is also related to this text that I had a professional position at that time in the Navy Social Service, working with chronically hospitalized psychiatric patients and their relatives. By the end of 1992 my project to resocialize those patients was extended by the authority to every office of the social service in the Argentinean country, but when I returned from a fortnight stay at Canada for this Conference, on May 1993, I was gradually deprived from my position until I was left with no functions⁴ in the frame of a new policy that endangered patients and families left on their own (Correa,

³ This paper was sent for publication on May 1992 to the *Journal of the Argentine Society of Psychodrama* that organized the October 11-13, 1991 meeting held at Buenos Aires, and was kept in the editorial box up to April 2000, when I was informed that the Journal was to be discontinued, so I strived to sent it to *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* of the University of Costa Rica, where after including an epistemologic section asked by the referee, it was finally published in the 2002 volume that addressed "Electoral behavior and Political culture" (Correa, 2002).

⁴ The description of the features that characterized the high degree of mobbing to which I was subjected surpasses the aims of this article.

1999), under a program that gave the lead of treatment to an outer private institution following the same privatization program that Menem and his political aids decided to rule over all Argentinean state organisms. Therefore, my Latin American cultural message in the story portended some signs of dead end or point of no return in the future that depicted isomorphic symbols of the destructive socio-cultural changes Argentinean institutions were undergoing: disappearance, if not personal this time but “professional”, was at stake and accounted for a vulnerability trait that seems to accompany new democracies afraid to fall back into the grips of a destructive past.

II Recreation of the story by the group

II.1 Participants’ stories inspired by the trigger story

The response to the narration of the story was explored through its re-creation by four attendants of the WS. Each participant told his own story in a third person point-of-view that disguised him into the story’s main character:

Participant *A* (male, 40-50 years old, of English origin). He told the story of a person that pursued being his real self, as he aimed not to become a professional who turns into a “superior person”, distant from other fellows.

Participant *B* (female, 30-40 years old, of English origin). Her story was also about a person willing to be herself, not dependent on the assistance of other persons.

Participant *C* (female of 30-40 years old of French origin). Told the story about a sad bird that hatches a stone hoping that it will become a living being.

Participant *D* (male of 25-35 years old of French origin). He told a dream that the story made him recall. The subject of the dream was a four year old child trapped in a hallway while he saw a black monster in ambush. He demands his parents and uncles for help, yelling desperately, but the later continued to talk calmly within a next room without taking any notice of his claims.

II. 2 Participant's comments

In this stage participants talked about the personal contents triggered and disclosed by the story told by the storyteller. Both men revealed, in the first place, the importance they had found in the music that was played immediately after the story ended (C. Debussy's *La mer*). They underscored that such importance was due to the emotional meaning that the music opened on them during the preceding year, which connected *A* to a situation of religious nature he had experienced at a park, close to a temple. Coincidentally, during the same time period, *D* used to hear that music when he relaxed alone. By contrast, the comments of the two women were related to their family or social lives: *B* told about her relationship with a grandparent (for whom she had knitted a scarf) and about the creativity that had evolved from that bond. She also recited a poem that her grandfather taught her. *C* on her side expressed through her narration the pain she felt because of the marginal life to which homosexuals are condemned by society.

III. Narration of a summary of the group stories

Taking as axis of a new story the contents that had sprouted from "The Colomber" in the stories and comments from the group, the storyteller told the story of 'Friend': Friend was the name given to a boy who, while he was strolling in a park, heard the voices of other children emerging from a hole where they had become trapped with no one hearing them until that moment when Friend walked by. The voices seemed strangely familiar to him. Bravely, he climbed down into the hole and found at the bottom a little boy that was like him but seemed extremely fearful that no one would ever take any notice of him. Happily, his fear disappeared immediately once Friend showed that he had listened to him. The small boy then took Friend by the hand and told him: "Come, I will introduce you to my two sisters". One of the girls was knitting a long scarf: "It is for keeping our throats warm and to stop us from

losing our voices, so that we can keep being able to cry or rehearse poems, no matter what, but sufficiently enough to express our inner life”, she explained. Then the second sister took Friend to a corner of the hole and dug with her hands in the earth until she found a sparkling stone she showed him, holding it with her dirty palms because of the dust, as well as from “the pain of rejection”. She said: “I will polish it to transform it into a precious stone of humanity”. “Now” said Friend: “You are all surely my brothers and sisters. I had been told that they had all disappeared. I don’t wish to be in the heights. Can I stay here and play with you?”.

IV. Group drama

The drama roles were played according to the story plot, participants representing its protagonists.

A played the boy that found the hole and went down to the bottom to be together with his mates.

D played the child that was trapped in the hole and cried out to be heard.

B was the girl that used all the chances she had to creatively express herself, rather than remain dependent on the care of others.

C played the girl who was sensitive to the sufferings of others, carrying by herself the work of polishing her own precious stone of humanity.

In the final stage of drama, the group followed the plot as retold by the storyteller, at the same time as they were asked to act out the story. Such proposition seemed too much “pressure” on them, and some participants – specially *B* – expressed embarrassment. They were therefore left to act out the drama on their own, while the storyteller distanced himself from the drama scene in order to watch them from further away causing him to reflect on this issue: “In fact I’m an stranger to them. In this part they need to find their own plot. What a pleasure to observe them at their own drama creation!!! Their gestures and expressions, as they sat on their knees, seemed to be really the same as those of children playing since they are so focused on

what they are doing. It would be a pity to interrupt them in order to fulfill the time schedule programmed for this part of the workshop”. Anyway, the short time left for closure obliged the storyteller to get into the group, and so he approached the group with a black cloth falling from one arm and another emerald green fabric lying on the other, at the same time exclaiming: “I sell the dark night and the fear of death that are to be transformed into a story, and I also sell the matter of dreams; green as life and eager as desire”. With the open arms covered by both cloths falling at each side, the group commented “he resembled a bird”. Now the “bird” approached the group and the participants chose which cloth to wear: the storyteller helped *D* to cover himself with the black fabric; in doing so, he extended his hands and fingers as if they were claws, chasing the other members of the group, threatening them: “I am a monster, I will kill you all”, so the group got confused and made *B* feel bad. Then “the bird” approached her and offered to cover her with the green cloth, as he told her: “Could you ask the monster just to dance and talk with you?”. At this moment Debussy's *La Mer* was played again, and as both characters on their green and black gowns began to dance, the storyteller continued to tell “both of them are to dance together eternally, transforming one into the other in such a way that when one creation is ended, destruction that follows starts to rebirth a new creation”.

V. Narration of the group's “drama story” versions by each participant

Finally, each member was invited to occupy the storyteller's place in order to tell the group his/her own version of the group's “drama story”. Instead of following this instruction, the participants told about their personal involvement in the stories and the whole storytelling experience, which had in common the sincere expression of feelings, emotions and personal reflections, along with self examination observations, all together forging a significant “fraternal” kind of communicative style, which indeed is not

common to observe in a group meeting that joins together for the first time. Regarding self examination, the anglophone members inquired of themselves whether the narration of the experience in English had constituted a limitation for the francophone speaking participants. The storyteller finally concluded that the freedom of talking like “brothers” in a common narration might mean a way of acknowledging both the points of difference as well those of concordance, instead of boosting dispute about “one or the other” or “I better than you”. It is because of this that a French version of the group story is added to this paper, as an Appendix (see Appendix).

VI. Post-WS story retelling and writing of group member’s stories: comments on “Story Telling to the Group and Group Recreation of the Story” by Neil Hobbs, August 1994

*Autobiographical notes*⁵:

These notes are part of my life story that impinge on the meeting at Montreal. Even though it is now fifteen months since I attended the conference “Metaphorically Speaking” held under the aegis of Les art-thérapeutes de Quebec, in Montreal, I retain vivid memories of the workshop in which I took part. I was the Anglophone male, A, cited in the text.

I. Re-reading the text of the paper brings back memories with extraordinary clarity; an almost preternatural clarity which does not seem to dim with age, unlike other memories. There are reasons perhaps for this which I will return to later. I am an English physician, trained at Cambridge University and St. Mary's Hospital, London, England. I first visited Canada in any professional capacity as a second-year medical student on an elective in 1971. I was to return twice more before I finally decided to settle for good in Canada in 1979, becoming a *citizen* in 1993. In the years 1977-79 I underwent a 2-year period of Family Medicine training at Oxford. Part of my decision to

⁵ This text is numbered I to V, respecting the original paragraphs in NH's text.

come to Canada was because, at the time when I qualified as a family physician, there was considerable unemployment in the United Kingdom. Difficulty in finding work extended to young physicians. I was found to have epilepsy during my years of study at Cambridge, and describe the circumstances of my first seizure later in this article, since it is related to the attendance at the Montreal workshop. This was to have a considerable impact on my ability to hold a driving licence, and substantially determined the subsequent trajectory of my life, professional and otherwise. At that time in the United Kingdom a single tonic-clonic seizure would deprive one of a driving licence for three years. I was thus unable to drive at a time when I needed to secure a job in Family Practice. I reasoned then, though I believe in the wiser light of hindsight that there were other deeper *psychological* reasons for doing so, that I would be “better off” if I looked for work in a remote area of Canada where a driving licence would not be needed. Perhaps such places could conceal my potential inability to provide for my family, which by now included my firstborn son, then less than two years old. Such areas of Canada were not unknown to my wife and I: we had met working in Northern Newfoundland, and had gone on to work in Labrador and the James Bay area of Hudson Bay in the mid-1970's. 1979 therefore saw me returning to Labrador for a term of service that was originally only a year long. It was extended one year, then with a reappointment to another hospital in a somewhat less remote area, my length of service stretched to eight years in all. For most of those times I really did not need a car! Transportation was by boat or snowmobile, and the hospital in Labrador had its own aeroplane for longer trips which was equally at home on floats or skis according to season. Later as my epilepsy came under some control, the chance came to acquire that symbol of North American independence, the automobile. The acquisition of a car by my family in post-war England – interestingly in the form of a gift to my parents from some good friends – was a highly significant event in my childhood. The car was even named by us “Augusta” and she was indeed an august machine, if somewhat old and cantankerous! Through her our family

acquired the means of independent transport. Not to be able to drive a car as a result of epilepsy has on many occasions for me seemed like a form of imprisonment. Happily I now enjoy much better control on different medication and a number of lifestyle changes. At the time I was a participant in Montreal I had only very recently been declared fit to drive again.

II. In 1977, I managed to move from the field of active medical practice in a small rural practice in a relatively impoverished area economically (but one rich in the ability of families caring for each other despite financial *adversity*, and in vernacular language traditions) to a teaching position at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. I became an associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine. From the moment of my arrival I became involved in the care of dying patients, and had an opportunity to become a member of a multidisciplinary team that was just starting to provide a consultation service for palliative care in one of the local teaching hospitals. It was a time when, locally, the whole concept of palliative care was in its relative infancy. The physician component of the team was supplied by general physicians, not specialists. This is quite unusual in Canada and created for the physicians the creative tension of being called on to provide help and guidance to specialists, though we were far more used to having help and guidance flow in the opposite direction. Times for our fledgling team were often hard, and overcoming professional opposition to our efforts was frequently daunting. This is an experience encountered and written about by others (Toscani, 1990), and is a common experience in palliative care. As team leader, I was a newcomer to the City and the University, and frequently felt promoted beyond my level of authentic competence. At our weekly team meetings we frequently told stories to each other of our various hardships endured in this difficult field of endeavour; this was a powerful team-building influence that kept us together for seven years. The first paper I published at Queen's University was on storytelling (Hobbs, 1993).

III. To this day I am not sure how the brochure advertising the conference “Metaphorically Speaking” ever reached my desk. There were to my knowledge no art therapists in Kingston and I had nothing to do with that profession, though I have always been interested in visual arts, and my father was a talented amateur artist. I had not requested the application form. In retrospect it seems like a jewel that one comes across accidentally in the dust, at risk of being overlooked altogether, something magical. It is like the jewel in the *columber's* mouth, quoted in the paper. Somehow the need to address the urge to “speak in the voice of metaphor” was strong and accounts for my attraction to the conference’s title. Much work in palliative care involves addressing the spiritual needs of patients as they die, rescuing spirituality from under the weight of science. And “spirituality also needs soul” points out Thomas Moore in his book *Care of the soul* (1994), “deep intelligence, a sensitivity to the symbolic and metaphoric life, genuine community, and attachment to the world”. In retrospect I was looking for a language in which to speak to spiritual needs of patients, and to my own needs. My participation in the workshop derived also from my professional interest in the processes of loss and mourning. In my opinion ubiquitous phenomena in the practice of Family Medicine, and I suspect medicine as a whole. It is a subject we attempt to introduce to all residents as part of their psychosocial training in the first year of our programme.

IV. So what did I experience during the workshop? Despite my nervousness at being only one of four participants, I think now that I was extremely fortunate to be one of a few. The intimacy that the group developed would not have been there with a larger group. I was perplexed during the introduction because of my unfamiliarity with the theoretical material being presented by Julio. I “connected” however once I was instructed to tell a story related to Debussy's *La Mer*. This story brought back powerful memories since the first time I heard this orchestral piece played “live” was in Cambridge during my final undergraduate medical year. The orchestra played in King's College chapel, a building renowned in the English-speaking world for its beauty, its

acoustics and its choral tradition. For me though, the most powerful memory of this building will be a summer's morning that same year. I had sat down on a bench feeling somewhat unwell that morning, having been to quite a party the night before! It was the last memory I had before recovering consciousness from my first-ever epileptic seizure. That “place in the sun” remains a “last place before my life changed for ever” because of my epilepsy. It was my first encounter with a medical condition that I was eventually to understand was something permanent. I could not wish it away or pretend that it did not exist, as I tried to do in some of the years that followed.

V. To be able to share this story with a skilful facilitator is therapeutic, even if not all of the background is known to the participants. I see the story of the *columber* working in a similar fashion; there are elements to the story that allow the participants to weave personal meaning into the metaphoric “threads” provided by the story. It is like a piece of cloth with the storyteller providing the vertical threads, and the listener the horizontal ones [*we would say the “woof” and the “warp”*]. The therapy continued throughout the day – the spell continued to be woven – as parts of our stories were later joined to form a new *story*. Not only that, but the story took flesh as we acted it out together in a cooperative fashion. Flesh on bones: what a beautiful feeling it was! Towards the end of the day I no longer had the professional discomfort of not being the “dignified physician” or “scientific person”. I could abandon myself to the act of cooperative creation with people who had been only strangers earlier that morning. I feel that the method of therapy shown here has a “power” to tell things about human experience, and to offer therapy, in ways that scientific medicine would find itself powerless to do. Not only that, but as I write about it a year later, I am aware the story continues to be woven when readers read of our experience or as I continue the work and rework my own experiences of the workshop in other ways. It is the kind of experience that I will still be able to remember years from now. It is perhaps the light of metaphor shining upon it that keeps the memories so fresh.

Discussion

A storytelling approach to groups as the one described in this paper provides each member the same opportunities and space to:

1. tell their own stories;
2. re-hear them, inserted in a broader story comprising all of the participant's stories;
3. participate in the group's recreation of the story.

Through the successive steps in the process, the storytelling session coordinator actively constructs new narrative with inputs from the group by searching for a way to accommodate the rich variety of expression in its members, which is not a mere collection of stories from a group seen from the viewpoint of a single authorized "anthologist" [see the introduction of this paper]. Therefore, a main role of the group storytelling coordinator is to generate a space for the group not only to tell, listen to, experience and understand their stories, but also to foster them in their recreation.

Storytelling itself helps establish such a space by "generating a common shared and differentiated space for each member", at the same time allowing metaphoric language to be used constantly, and thus favoring a display of personal creativity (Correa, Gonzalez; Weber, 1991). In this same vein, a fertile creative milieu is provided to all participants in order to encourage everyone's preferred communicative modes of expression: reading related material, drawing, body representing, playing music, even remaining silent. This, therefore, enables each participant to adjust their contributions by using expressive aspects that might otherwise have remained hidden by a personal shortcoming, in particular those involving narrative or communication skills.

By pursuing an active commitment from the group participants, the group storytelling coordinator endeavours to ensure that his/her original narrator role will finally be held by every member. Therefore the dynamics of this group

storytelling method enables the deployment of narrative skills in each participant together to ensure their involvement in the group recreation of the story. During the whole group storytelling process stories are to be combined in a circular interaction, aiming to strengthen closeness and communication between members as well as to conserving their individual identities, while the free interactive nature of group recreation makes the transformation of the original story possible.

As shown in this experience, the group recreation of the story finally transforms the protagonist's original account told by the storyteller into a new plot made from several characters' interactions (Correa, 2006b). This showed the simultaneous forging of a significant "fraternal" communicative style amongst participants, seen when they reached enough intimacy to express their feelings, emotions and thoughts; as well as self-examined comments that are not customarily seen in recent acquaintances. Such an experience was otherwise vividly reported in the post-WS comments by the Canadian participant [NH].

In this respect, WS's Canadian Anglophone group members made remarks on a possible language bias in the group story production, as the WS was held in English and integrated Canadian Francophones. The conceptual framework under which this paper is discussed, supporting a systemic narrative theory, assumes that coherence with a genuine group narrative challenges us to consider the cultural identities of its members, and this poses the difficult task of comprehension and integration of stories in an heterogeneous cultural group. Following such a line of thought, the need to esteem all the members' cultural identities as parts of the "mosaic" of cultural stories, led us to resolve to include in this paper as "language stories", bilingual versions of the WS storytelling experience (see Appendix).

Bilingual narrative and storytelling might be applied both to clinical (Costantino, 1989) as well to educational settings (Correa, 2003), proving a gateway to challenge cultural submissiveness in the use of language and at the same time opening new channels to multicultural approaches to

“languages conversation”. Multicultural communication must be specially taken in account concerning mental health matters, as it exposes both the professional and the patient to misunderstanding and/or prejudice (Goldner-Vukov, 2004), mostly during communication involving emotionally-charged material such as communication around bereavement (Ajemian; Mount, 1982). As for language difficulties in comprehension, the question of differences in metaphor construction that may sometimes render communication unintelligible between different cultures and languages, might equally involve every group system into challenging its real comprehension of the messages being communicated. This a task, proper to every transcultural saga, is the search for diverse meaning rather than a contest for imposing one. Therefore it seems essential to find new ways to expand interaction in conversation in languages where things are differently named, alternative from the ones incorporating foreign terms, as could, for example, be offered by poetic narrative through widening aesthetic meaning (Correa, 2006a).

Multicultural communication also challenges the integration of stories of diverse cultural sources: in this group story experience, the “co-articulation” (Silveira, 2006) of a story with a Latin American cultural message to a set of stories of the Canadian bicultural group.

Concerning the Latin American message that is transmitted together with the story told by the storyteller, it may be stated that the Latin American sociocultural structure featured by interrupted exercises of democracy and severe disrespect for human rights gives birth to democracies that are fragile in achieving adequate protection for their citizens, both legally and in the matter of providing safety for personal and professional development, a reason that has been claimed for Latin American emigration to Canada (Schervier, 2005). Similar reasons in the past, as during war and authoritative regimes, brought European immigrants to Latin America (a whole story within the Italian story selected for the 1993 workshop).

On the other hand, when looking at the Canadian group stories, they highlight the members’ attempts to strive for

personal values as well their fear from destruction because of isolation or disabling disease, as emerged in the personal accounts, group drama and post-WS comments of the one participant (Correa, 2006b). Neil Hobbs' report of his personal and medical biography specially contributes to draw the present socially anomalous situations that threaten the survival of many modern workers throughout the world, especially professionals subjected to highly competitive cultures, submitting them to different ordeals: i.e. unemployment, forced migration, financial adversity and professional opposition intermingling with life events as in his case, the possibility of catching a potentially disabling illness and at the same time having to manage the exigencies of raising a family and develop a practice in a remote area of Canada. This was furthermore a somewhat peripatetic practice involving quite regular travel "on floats or skis", that relates to the spirit that is needed for increasing autonomy, the development of communication skills and fostering of identity together to overcome limit experiences, as emerged in the analysis of his text (Correa, 2006b). Finally, the vulnerability and fear of disappearing into the void of a destructive past issue present in the Latin American story as an input to the Canadian group story, matches similar threats posed by injury or death on every cultural, group, individual and species' system, triggering in them a survival strategy for escaping destruction, perhaps by following a biological self-organization response to such threats (Bustuoabad; Correa, 2004): in the group drama story a creative outcome to destruction self-organized within a complementary story where both destruction and creation danced together, "transforming one into the other in such a way that when one creation is ended, it starts to rebirth a new creation". This pattern coheres with the uninterrupted exercise of democracy, human rights and multicultural interactions that also encompass discontent – especially between certain cultures, including long-standing disagreements between Anglophones and Francophones, as well as indigenous peoples' remembrances of the abuses received from European settlers, that are a hallmark of Canadian culture.

In contrast to the biblical myths endorsing themes of

threat and punishment to those migrants to other lands when they risk parting from their own cultures (Correa, 1994), group storytelling and group recreation of the story encourages communication and creative interactions among diverse cultures, at the same time that boosts the survival and expansion of diversity in cultural/ language legacies. This scope may especially apply to Canadian studies on immigration and cultural exchange with Latin American countries.

Appendix⁶

Récit d'un conte à un groupe et récréation du conte par le groupe

La méthode de narration groupale. Est explorée ici la réponse à la narration du conte inductif *Le Colomme* (raconté par le Narrateur Directeur -N.D.-), et sa récréation au cours d'un travail d'atelier composé de quatre personnes et réalisé dans le cadre du 10^e Colloque de l'Association des art-thérapeutes du Québec: *La Métaphore Racontée* (30 avril-2 mai, 1993), Montréal, Québec, Canada.

1. Sélection du conte axée sur le thème de l'atelier «expériences de pertes»: «Story telling to the bereaved group and story recreation by the group» (Correa, 1993a).

2. Re-crédation du conte. Contes des participants inspirés du conte inductif. Chacun des participants a produit une narration dont le personnage principal est une tierce personne.

Participant A (homme entre 40 et 50 ans d'origine anglaise): raconte l'histoire d'une personne qui aspire à être vraiment elle-même, au point de ne pas vouloir devenir un professionnel dont l'activité en ferait un «personnage supérieur», éloigné de ses proches.

⁶ La forme de pensée d'une langue est très spécifique et ne peut pas se contenter d'une traduction littérale. Ce qui semble clair dans une langue ne l'est pas forcément dans l'autre. Michelle Metivier.

Participant *B* (femme de 30 à 40 ans d'origine anglaise): Son conte est aussi l'expression d'une personne qui veut être elle-même, et ne plus s'occuper des autres.

Participant *C* (femme de 30 à 40 ans d'origine française): raconte l'histoire d'un oiseau triste qui couve une pierre dans l'espoir que cette pierre deviendra un être vivant.

Participant *D* (homme de 25 à 35 ans d'origine française): raconte un rêve que le conte a fait surgir de sa mémoire. Le sujet de ce rêve est un enfant de quatre ans enfermé dans un couloir et guetté par un monstre noir. Il crie désespérément pour appeler à l'aide ses parents et ses oncles; ceux-ci parlent tranquillement dans une chambre contiguë et ne l'entendent pas.

2.2. Commentaires. Lors de cette étape, les participants ont parlé des contenus personnels révélés par le conte inductif. Les deux hommes évoquent dans un premier temps l'importance de la musique entendue après le conte (*La mer* de C. Debussy). Puis ils parlent d'une étrange coïncidence: l'importance qu'a eu cette musique pour tous les deux au cours de l'année qui vient de s'écouler. Pour *A*, elle se rattache à un fait de nature religieuse, ressenti dans un parc voisin d'un temple. Quant à *B*, il avait pris l'habitude d'écouter cette musique lorsqu'il était seul. En ce qui concerne les deux femmes, leurs commentaires se rapportent à leur(s) vie(s) familiale(s) ou sociale(s): *B* raconte sa relation avec son grand-père (elle lui avait tricoté une écharpe) et la créativité qui a surgi de cette relation. Elle récite aussi un poème qu'il lui a appris. *C* exprime par sa narration la douleur qu'elle ressent de voir les homosexuels condamnés à leur marginalisation sociale.

Narration-synthèse. Sur la base des contes inspirés de *Le Colomme* et des commentaires des participants, le N. D. conte l'histoire d'Ami; Ami est un garçonnet qui, marchant dans un parc, entend sortir d'un trou dans le sol des voix d'enfants prisonniers. Ami est le premier à entendre ces voix, qui lui semblent étrangement familières. Téméraire, il décide de descendre. Arrivé en bas il trouve un garçonnet qui lui

ressemble et qui avait peur que personne ne l'entende – une peur qui se dissipe lorsqu'il s'aperçoit qu'un autre garçon peut lui répondre. Il prend Ami par la main et lui dit : «Viens, je vais te présenter mes deux sœurs». L'une d'elles est en train de tricoter une longue écharpe. «C'est pour réchauffer notre gorge, pour ne pas devenir muettes, pour être capables de parler, crier, réciter tout ce qui exprime notre vie intérieure», expliquent-elles. Puis la deuxième sœur emmène Ami dans un coin. Elle creuse la terre avec ses mains et trouve une pierre brillante, qu'elle lui montre. Ses paumes sont salies par la terre et par «la douleur du rejet». «Alors», dit Ami, «vous êtes sûrement mon frère et mes sœurs. On m'avait dit qu'ils avaient disparu. Je n'aime pas être là-haut. Je peux rester ici et jouer avec vous?».

Dramatisation du groupe. Les rôles furent joués selon la trame et les personnages créés par les participants.

A interpréta l'enfant du parc, qui descend dans le trou pour rejoindre ses pairs.

D joua l'enfant du trou qui demandait à être écouté.

B fut la fillette qui désirait employer sa créativité pour exprimer toutes ses possibilités, parfois limitée par l'obligation de s'occuper de ses proches.

C interpréta la fillette qui prenait part aux souffrances des autres, acte qui polit sa propre pierre précieuse d'humanitarisme.

Pour l'étape finale de la dramatisation, le groupe devait agir selon les indications du N. D. Il n'en fût rien; au contraire, cette proposition semblait trop contraignante pour les participants et les gênait. Ils terminèrent la dramatisation selon leurs propres idées. Le N. D. s'éloigna de la scène dramatique pour les observer à distance, et cela produisit en lui les réflexions suivantes: «En fait je suis un étranger pour eux, à ce stade ils doivent trouver leur propre trame. Quel plaisir de contempler leur création dramatique! Leurs gestes et expressions, assis ou agenouillés, semblent être vraiment propres aux enfants ou semblent être vraiment enfantines; ils sont tellement absorbés par ce qu'ils font qu'il sera pénible de les interrompre à cause du temps qui est accordé à ce travail d'atelier». La stratégie de clôture exigeant l'auto-inclusion du N. D., il se rapprocha du

groupe avec un tissu noir sur un bras et un vert émeraude sur l'autre. Il déclara: «Je vends la nuit noire et la peur de la mort qui se transforment en un conte, et je vends aussi la matière des rêves ; verte comme la vie et avide comme le désir». Les bras ouverts et les tissus tombant des deux côtés, il ressemblait à un oiseau, commenta le groupe. Alors l'oiseau s'approcha du groupe et les participants choisirent les tissus. Il aida *D* à se couvrir du tissu noir; celui-ci étendit ses mains et ses doigts comme des griffes et se tourna vers les autres membres pour les menacer: «Je suis un monstre, je vais tous vous tuer», ce qui produisit une confusion parmi le groupe et un malaise chez *B*. L'oiseau s'approcha de celle-ci et lui proposa de se couvrir avec le tissu vert, tout en lui disant: «Veux-tu proposer au monstre de parler avec toi?». Alors les deux personnages, l'un couvert de vert et l'autre de noir, dansèrent ensemble éternellement; l'un devenait l'autre, et vice-versa, de telle sorte que quand une création est terminée la destruction qui en résulte peut donner naissance à une nouvelle création.

Narration du conte recréée par les participants. Finalement, chaque membre fut invité à occuper la place du *N. D.* pour exposer le conte issu de la dramatisation. Mais cette invitation ne fut pas suivie; au contraire, les participants racontèrent des histoires personnelles dont le dénominateur commun était une très grande sincérité dans l'expression des sentiments, des émotions et des réflexions personnelles, ainsi que des pensées autocritiques; tout cela dans un style de communication fraternelle, peu habituelle dans un groupe qui se rencontre pour la première fois. Dans le bilan d'autocritique, les membres anglophones se sont demandés si la narration en anglais de faits vécus n'avait pas constitué une limitation pour les francophones. Le *N. D.* conclut finalement que la liberté de parler comme «frères» dans une narration peut signifier une manière de reconnaître les points de différence et de ressemblance, au lieu d'une dispute «l'un mieux que l'autre» ou «moi plus que toi». C'est pour cette raison que la deuxième partie de ce travail a été réécrite en français.

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