New Approaches in Personal Development Field -
Appreciative Socialization Group

Researcher Assistant Simona PONEA¹
Lecturer Ph.D. Antonio SANDU² ³

Abstract

Appreciative socialization group represents an innovative way of personal
development. Through this presentation, we want to highlight the importance of both positive
thinking and positive acting, as two of the most important steps necessary in the process
of personal development. This model was first implemented with a group of persons with physical
disabilities and then was theoretical developed in Lumen Research Centre in Humanistic
Sciences. Will be presented during this article those elements that were combined, and that
facilitated the evolution of the proposed model, and also its transformation in a successful model
of personal development. The basic methods used in realizing the research were the
documentation and the observation. Appreciative group socialization is comprised from a
number of elements from the appreciative inquiry field, the process of socialization, the process
of empowerment and also from the partnership process.

Keywords:
Appreciative socialization group, personal development, appreciative inquiry,
empowerment, partnership, equality.

¹ Researcher Assistant at Lumen Research Centre in Humanistic Sciences, Uk Branch, Phone
0044 7583621136, Email: simonaponea@gmail.com.
² Postdoctoral fellow at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Gr. T. Popa”, Iasi, Romania,
Phone no. 0040 740 151455, Email antonio1907@yahoo.com
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1. Appreciative Socialization Group

Fundamental concepts: social group - socialization - appreciative inquiry

In outlining the theoretical and practical "appreciative socialization group" model, the key concepts that were brought together are "group", "socialization process" and "appreciative inquiry". For a better understanding of the mixing process (Cojocaru, 2010) between these three concepts / phrases we consider as necessary to define each of them. Appreciative Socialization Group is a new model that comes with the new "rules", and also with "borrowed" rules, which are specific to the above mentioned concepts.

Adrian Necula (2007) presents the origin of "group" as coming from the "Italian fine art", where this concept means "more individuals forming a painted or carved topic". From here the concept has been spread throughout arts, then in literature, where it receives the sense of meeting people, cohesion and communication among its members, with a special note of "circle" or "meeting of equals".

According to sociological perspective of human development, we can identify two basic types of groups: reference group and membership group. The reference group represents the group where the individual is socialized and to whose rules and values joins. The reference group is the early socialization, thus the individual prepares itself to take its new rules and values. One such example, of anticipatory socialization, is represented by the phenomenon of migration, where the migrants suffer a process of re-socialization in the norms and values of the reference group, ie the social group into which they integrate in the destination country. From here we deduce the risks of socialization when we refer to the "return migration", when the returned migrant does not accept anymore the norms and values of the original group, and also does not recognize this one as its membership group (Badea, 2009). From the sociology of migration and minorities, we extend the anticipatory socialization mechanism to any type of minority group, as people with disabilities, sexual minorities etc. (Ionescu, 1993; Dorofte, 1991, 1997, Neamtu, 2004; Neculau, 2007).

American literature (Corey, M. Corey, 1977) defines "group" as a microcosm of society, which can provide a "sample" of reality, pulled out from the participants' experiences to various activities that take place in this framework. This "proof of reality" shows how we interact among ourselves, how we receive feedback, how we evolve, how we meet problems and also how we overcome them.
Objectives of a group are achieved through proposed actions that have the purpose of social change of reality. Researchers Gerald Corey and Marianne Schneider Corey (1977) mention a series of objectives of social groups:

- to become more open and honest with others
- to learn to trust themselves and others
- to learn to become free and overcome terms such as: it is mandatory, you must
- to fully develop and accept themselves and learn to not expect perfection from their person and from others
- to recognize and accept the "conflicts" with others
- to listen and understand those around
- to be heard and understood by those around you
- to able to tolerate ambiguity
- to learn to choose between alternatives because nothing is certain in life
- to identify solutions to solve problems
- to behave with others with respect, appreciation, honesty

Constantin Schifirnea (2002:45-46) examines the motifs to join a social group and highlights the following:

- The attraction to group activities;
- Sympathy for group members;
- The needs of members per se.

Also, Linda Farris Kurtz (1997:24-29) says about social groups that have the great merit of facilitating the transformation of the individual, of generating "growth / development" of the individual (empowerment), of leading to a better intrinsic knowledge, of identifying new perspectives on an issue (reframing), and not least, of developing a new style of living. Each of them can not be possible without the individual's own desire for change. The change must be desired and supported itself through various resources, through will, but also by others.

When we refer to the second concept, namely the socialization process, it is defined by researcher Anthony Giddens (2001) as the "process by which a person becomes self-aware, intelligent, integrated in the type of culture that was born [...] socialization linking between them different generations". Through socialization is realized a process of transmission of social norms, habits, values, attitudes, from the simplest to most complex (Dorofte, 2001:10).

According to the author Dorofte Tatiana, the social construction of personality is realised through social interactions, by which the individual finds himself and re-builds himself gradually by successive changes of the status quo -
cognitive and socio-emotional (Dorofte, 2001) depending on the complexity of social interactions in which the individual is involved.

Gergen also points out that modern paradigm considers as implicit that there is a reasonable background of knowledge, and hence of socialization (Gergen, 2005:98). On the other hand, constructionist therapies are based on the idea of contextualization process of socialization, according to the different groups of belonging where the individual socialize, and by reference to which reconstructs the interpretive reality. In this respect we can not refer to a unique socialization process, but to a simultaneous and / or successive series of socializing processes, according to the reference or membership group, for which the interpretation of social reality it is realized. With no single way of interpretation of reality, the consciousness tends to understand it as being plural, and enabling the experience of "plurality of social realities" depending on the socialized context (Sandu, 2009a; Sandu, 2010a, b; Sandu, Ponea, 2010a, b).

According to Adrian Neculau, the socialization process stimulates the creation of similarities, but also differences between the members of a community or a group, thus the individual is constantly changing and developing of social and personal skills and capabilities (Neculau, 2007:31).

As previously mentioned, socialization is learning by interacting with others, coherent structures, patterns of social behavior, norms, rules, values, etc..

When we are referring to the final concept used on creating this model, namely the appreciative inquiry, we consider mainly the fact that it was launched in 1987 through the work of David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivatsa "Appreciative inquiry in organizational life", that defines appreciative inquiry as "seeking what is best in people, and organizations around the world. Appreciative inquiry involves systematic discovery of what gives "life" to a system of life, when it is most alive, most effective and constructive in terms of economic, environmental or human" (Cojocaru, 2005; Sandu 2009b).

A framework methodology used with appreciative groups is developed by Cooperrider and Withney (2005) and by Gervase Bush (2010), named AI Summits. This methodology proposes the experimentation of totality (experience of wholeness) using a protocol based on a 4D Design, for transmission and acquiring of an appreciative state as experience of what gives life to individual, group and organization.

An important role in the development of appreciative socialization group are held by the appreciative pedagogy principles, which are referring to the "partnership" between the educator and the educated. This experience can be integrated with the philosophical discourse, especially referring to the
maieutic and Platon's dialogues. The hermeneutic of reality, seen as a philosophical reflection on positive experiences of every day, falls in the tradition of philosophical search for ultimate meanings of reality. Appreciative speech starts from the postmodern vision from a constructivist and constructionism approach, according which reality itself is a social construction generated by successive negotiations of the interpretations (Madrid, 2008; Sandu, 2010c, Ponea, Sandu, 2011).

Stefan Cojocaru highlights the fact that appreciative inquiry is based on appreciation and valuing of what is best in the organization/group, continues with building a vision of what could be and the dialogue of what should be, based on the assumption that organization/group is a mystery that should be discovered (2005:53).

2. Methodological framework

Next we point out the main theoretical insights that led to the formation of appreciative socialization group model:

- Constructionism - is a semiotic paradigm that starts from "interpretive axiom", which considers that the map through which the reality is read, is nothing but the continuous negotiation of interpretation. Any type of speech is interpreted as a "social reconstruction of reality" starting from a cultural consensus. The meanings of concepts, in which they are drawn from the cultural discourse in scientific language, is a paradigmatic model, relatively independent of the science that comes from. Cultural derivation of the concepts' meaning underlies semantic convergence of any socio-cultural paradigms. In the mentality's plan takes place the deepest attitude for restructuring, moving from understanding an objective world, knowable, unique to a model of a plurality of worlds, whose indeterminacy is theoretically predicted (Sandu, Ponea, 2011). As Stefan Cojocaru stated constructionism abandons the idea that the individual mind is the mirror of reality. Constructionism is based on relationships and support the significant role of the individual in the construction of reality (2005:25).

- Andragogy - this can be defined in terms of literature as:
  a. A science that deals with adult education methods;
  b. A field of knowledge and social practice whose specific purpose is an educational aid for the benefit of adults;
  c. A form of voluntary learning for adults (Sandu, Ponea, Bradu, 2009; Sandu, Cojocaru, Ponea, 2010).

The constructionism andragogy process is closely related with the "educational partnership", promoted by Varona Madrid (2008), whom argues the need for collaboration centered on equality between the trainer and the
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educated one. This peer equality is seen both in terms of transmission of information (peer learning), and also in plan of social statuses, where the learning process is established. This peer equality is the process that values the sectorial competence and human value of the interlocutor. Most often is used in the academic, scientific, educational and professional fields. The trainer is the student's partner, gives him support and values his achievements, transferring him such a high level of self-esteem and a social space good for his personal and professional development. Thus the education of adults is based on a permanent partnership, which the central role belongs to students and trainers alike, as they are in the same team (Sandu, Cojocaru, Ponea, 2010).

- Transdisciplinarity - the principles appreciative method in sociology (Cojocaru, 2005:48-50) are linked to the idea of inseparability between researcher and social environment. Social organizations are the results of interactions between mental models of individuals who compose it. The objectivity of an organization is given by the correlation of subjective realities. The research process of the organization and its change are simultaneous. Social Reality (organization) - as Elliot believes - can be viewed as a text that can always be interpreted (cf. Cojocaru, 2005:49). Thomas Wachowski notes that at the level of social reality the map (image of social reality) precedes the territory (reality itself). "If people define a situation as real, this is true by defining it through its real consequences" (cf. Cojocaru, 2006b:49). The consequences of scientific theories, propose experiments to be performed to justify it. These experiments fracture reality to match the theoretical model. The researcher's map, scientific theory precedes the territory (experiment).

- Appreciative inquiry - Antonio Sandu (2009b) summarizing the literature states that various authors have defined appreciative inquiry as a paradigm of conscious evolution, generated by the new century (Hubard 1998), a methodology that leads to the idea of social construction of reality to its positive extreme by emphasizing the metaphor and the narrative, relating with the way of knowledge and language, and bringing it to its full potential of generating theory - "The most important generating theory" (Gergen, 1996) -; "The most important theory in action research in the last decade" (Bushe, 1991); "A New Yoga of research "(Harman, 1991); a radically affirmative approach to change through the complete removal of centered problem management type (White, 1997); the philosophical stone of organizational development (Sorenson,1996). Representative for appreciative inquiry is the 4 D model, which involves steps in creating and developing future successful plans and strategies and their implementation.
- Mixing methods and hybridization of theories - Stefan Cojocaru defines hybridization of theories as a form of discovery, construction and argumentation of new theories from elements of different paradigms (Cojocaru, 2010:148). The process of mixing methods is seen by the same author as the use of combined social research methods aimed to describe accurate and fair the complexity of social reality. The mixing has the advantage of reducing errors inherent methodological application of any methodology, and on the other hand, to generate deeper and broader meanings (2010:144). Mixing is therefore a depth methodological clarifying and generating process in the evaluation process of social reality, while the hybridization of theories generates, through its transparadigmatic character, social innovation. Regarding the hybridization of implemented theories and models in the appreciative socialization group - "Coffee morning" - can be observed the shift from focusing on the problem (where the scope of the activity was social integration of disabled people in line with the identified needs), to the paradigm focused on the positive assessment (made by the methods and instruments used in carrying out the activity).

3. Social Partnership - a form of Collaborative Creativity

Appreciative Socialization Group "Coffee morning"

Appreciative socialization group - "Coffee Morning" was conducted during the period between March 2009 till May 2010, and was implemented with a group of people with locomotor disabilities.

Appreciative socialization group has its origins in different types of groups officially recognized by the literature in the social field and peer groups, like support group, T group, meeting group and other different types (Ponea, Sandu, 2011). The methodology of development, organization and implementation of this model was based on the principle of collaborative research (Heron, 1996:56) and also on the basic features of collaborative creativity.

Appreciative Socialization Group is a type of social group which includes key elements from different group models, seeking social integration of its members and self-development through the stability of the frame deployment, this one being favorable for expressing positive experiences, establishing new relationships in society, achieving social integration, identification of common issues with other group members, improving self-esteem and promoting equality between individuals of society.

Based on appreciative inquiry, "Coffee Morning" activity, brings a new perspective on the model described above by introducing the concept of partnership in the "self-development" between the organizing team and the clients of intervention. Appreciative socialization group has a uniform look,
having in its composition both members of the beneficiary community and also from the implementation team, all of whom are in relationships of equality and being equally considered members of the group.

The idea of the present group model started from the proposal of forming a partnership between professionals, volunteers and beneficiaries, as the model formulated in the educational field by Verona Federico Madrid. Adapted from this model we believe that between specialists, volunteers and beneficiaries can be "signed" a collaboration agreement, to assist in personal and professional development for all the parts implicated. Each of the participants learns from new experiences, regardless of the level of knowledge that each individual member has.

Such as an educational partnership (Yballe, O'Connor, 2004, Madrid, 2008; Sandu, 2009; Nicolaescu, 2010) refers to various benefits for both parties, in the same way the "social" partnership means gain for all its members. Thus the experience of the "beneficiary" part is emphasised, especially on positive elements, its successful strategies, and also in order to develop this partnership.

Appreciative socialization group has the purpose to "force" the its members to move from "victim status" (autovulnerabilitate) to the "winner stage". "Vulnerability represents a state of potentiality, a non-manifestation in the present of factors that may lead in future to marginalization, disadvantage or other related phenomena, a mental map of inadequate interpretations in relation with the reality or the potential of person" (Cojocaru, 2005:30). Most times people affected by some disability go through various negative processes, such as marginalization, exclusion or discrimination, but are equally emphasized processes like auto-vulnerability, auto-discrimination or auto-marginalization.

We are witnessing a double negative process that sustain the exclusion of disabled people. By applying appreciative socialization group the person has the capacity to overcome both external and internal negative processes (Ponea, 2010b).

The participating member in this group it is the one who "takes the power" (by the process of empowerment) and integrates its own merits, through its successful stories, proposes objectives, especially through the positive results obtained. In this way, their objectives become increasingly higher and more desirable.

Appreciative socialization group followed the steps of 4D model (Bushe 2000; Cooperider, Whitney, 2005; Thatchenkery, 2004, 2008, Gergen et all, 2004; Cojocaru, 2004, 2010a) where we added one very important step as follows:

Step 1: Identify needs and planning
Step 2: Discovery
Step 3: Dream
Step 4: Design
Step 5: Destiny for details (Ponea, Sandu, 2011).
Appreciative socialization group, through the activity "Coffee Morning", held a "tridimensional" personal and professional development. On the one hand we are referring to the direct beneficiaries, then the volunteers, and not least the professionals, from the organization that implemented all.

4. Results of implementation of Appreciative Socialization Group

Among the group results of the implementation of this model include:
- expanding the social network of the participating members
- establishing closer relations between disabled people - volunteers - experts
- personal development group members
- active involvement of group members in carrying out social activities

5. Conclusions

We believe that the appreciative socialization group can be implemented with different types of groups, whether they are in a state of vulnerability or not. We believe that the advantages of implementing this model are manifold, but primarily because it supports the personal development of those involved.

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Simona PONEA, Ph.D. Antonio SANDU

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