Transdisciplinarity and executive coaching?
An example of researching questioning practices

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Applied linguistics in the professions: The value of transdisciplinarity in a changing world

Outline

- Helping profession ‚executive coaching'
- Questions in helping professions
- Epistemes on questioning practices in coaching
- Transdisciplinarity
- TSPP-Model
- QueSCo: a transdisciplinary research project

Helping profession 'executive coaching'

"… a helping relationship formed between **a client who has managerial authority** and responsibility in an organization and **a consultant** who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to **assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance** and personal satisfaction and consequently to **improve the effectiveness of the client's organization** within a formally defined coaching agreement" (Kilburg 2000, 65f; emphasis added FD & EG)

Executive coaching: geared towards change

- "[p]eople come to coaching for lots of different reasons, but the bottom line is change" (Whitworth et al. 1998: xix)

- 'co-constructing change' as one of the four defining basic activities in coaching; takes place in coaching conversations across several sessions as part of entire coaching process (Graf 2019)

Questions in helping professions

?

"... questions originate in the human aptitude to initiate **hypothetical imagination processes** prone to transform into **self-reflection processes**; questions allow for new experience given that they entail a **change of perspective** and a possible **change in one's point of view**. Questions help to localize **knowledge gaps**, to express **knowledge requirements**, to articulate one's interest in **reasons**, [and] to **relate to the present as well as to the past** " (cf. Köller 2004: 662, Graf et al. 2020a: 225)

=> questions represent a core tool of the work of helping professionals!

Questioning Practices in Coaching:
Epistemes of experience and of expertise (Graf & Dionne in press)

- **Knowing that**
  - Coaches' episteme of experience in doing what's best for their clients along the process
- **Knowing why**
  - Psychologists' episteme of expertise on success factors and phases of change
- **Knowing how**
  - Applied linguists' episteme of expertise on turn-by-turn construction of coaching conversations in general and of knowledge in particular

Knowing that

Practitioners' professional experience with questions as important discursive strategy in coaching:

- "silver bullet" of clients' introspection
- crucial intervention which guides the coaching process
- coaches' most important tool to enable change for clients
- …

(Fischer-Epe 2012; Schreyögg 2012; Loebbert & Wilmes 2013)

Knowing that

- Practitioners' accounts of their actions are often based on "idealizations, typifications and selected post hoc observations" (Vehviläinen 1999: 37; see also Stokoe & Sikveland 2016).

- Questions are presented in monological and de-contextualized form with invented examples used for illustration

Knowing that

- **Use of questions based on appropriate responsiveness** (Kramer & Stiles 2015)
  - Underlying professional theory of change
  - In-situ development of the coaching conversation

- Researching approriate responsiveness requires different types of knowledge (i.e. from psychology and (applied) linguistics)

Knowing why

- Psychological research on coaching as predominantly outcome-oriented
  - "does coaching work?" and "which factors work?" (Schermuly 2019: 21ff)
- Investigation of questions focusing on frequency, types and impact on clients' affect, cognition and/or behaviour in coaching (=> global effectiveness of questions)

(e.g., Theeboom et al. (2016) and Grant & Gerrard (2019) demonstrated that both solution-oriented questions and combination of problem- and solution-oriented types decrease clients' negative affect and have positive effect on their cognitive flexibility)

Knowing why

- Findings based on non-naturally occurring coaching conversations
  - Students and learning coaches
  - Processes carried out for research purposes
- Use of fixed sets of questions
  - E.g. *How long has this been a problem?* or *What impact is thinking about this solution having on you?* (Grant & O'Connor 2010: 105)
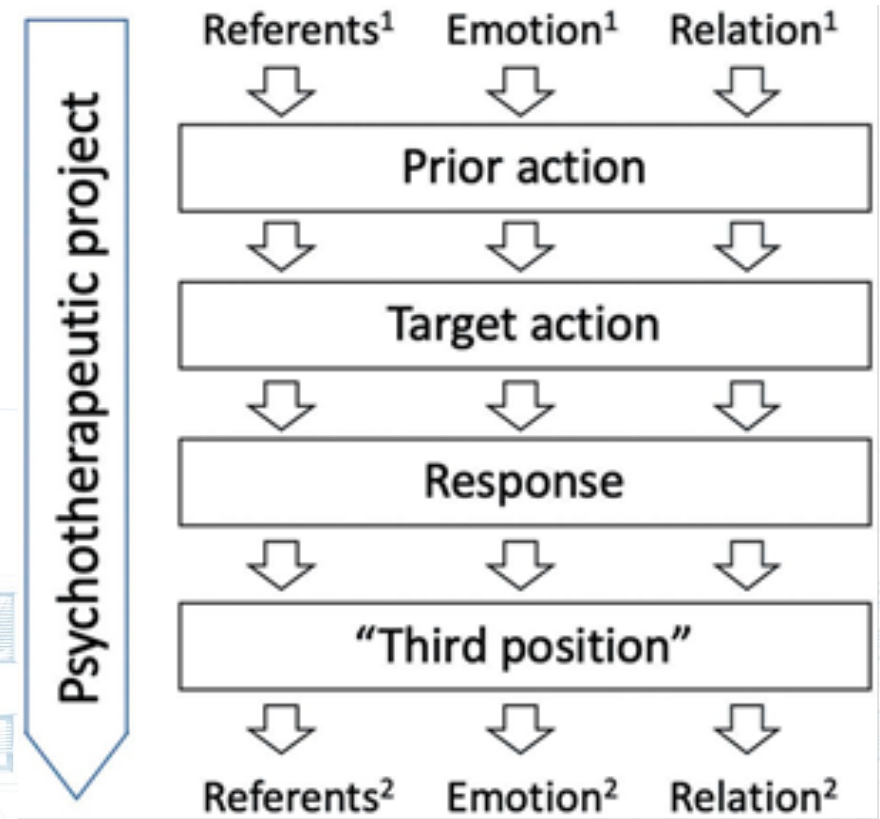
Knowing how

- Applied linguistic research on coaching is process-oriented (Graf 2019)
  - Use of psychotherapeutic findings as sensitizing concepts (coaching research applies research paradigms from psychotherapy)

- Conversation analytic focus (Schegloff 2007)
  - Sequentiality and co-construction of intersubjectivity as agents of change

Knowing how

- **Transformative sequences**
  (Peräkylä 2019 for psychotherapy)

=> Local transformation / change potential of questioning practices with questions as target actions

Knowing how

- **Cutting-edge research focus in coaching**
    - Spranz-Fogasy et al. (2019) compare example requests in psychotherapy and coaching
    - Graf & Kabatnik (under review) and Kabatnik & Graf (in prep). on solution-focused questions in coaching

BUT: Sequential perspective cannot link questions to phases of change (and consequently global effectiveness) and coaching agenda
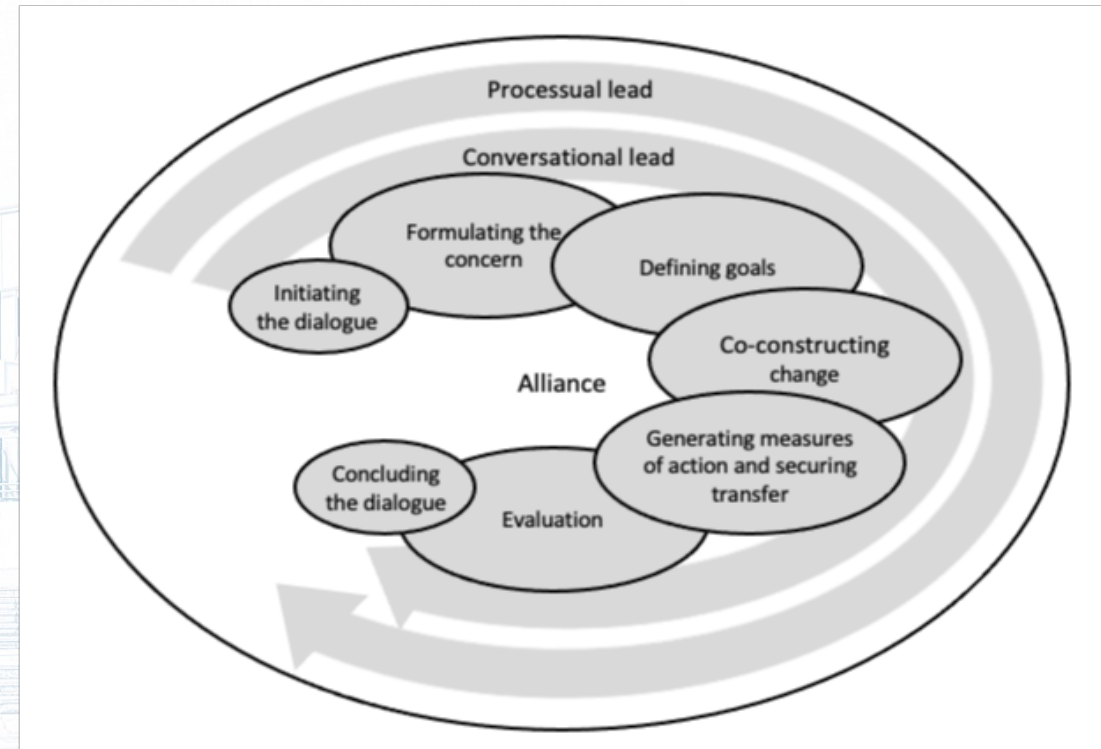
Transdisciplinarity

2 understandings of transdisciplinarity (Perrin & Kramsch 2018)

- as transcending discipline within academia (TD1)

- as transcending academia as exclusive source of legitimate knowledge (TD2)

  => Interprofessional collaboration between academia and practice (Sarangi 2015)

TSPP Model (Turn-Sequence-Phase-Process)

= TD1 work in conceptualizating coaching

- relating sequentiality of conversations with established phases of change (Deplazes, Graf & Künzli 2018)
- based on / integrating phases of change of change (psychology) and basic activities of coaching (applied linguistics)

(adapted from Deplazes et al. 2018

QueSCo (**Que**stioning **S**equences in **Co**aching) A transdisciplinary research project (Graf et al. 2020)

- DACH-Project: Austria, Germany & Switzerland

- TD1: Applied Linguistics (Austria & Germany) + Psychology (Switzerland)
  - Researchers from Austria and Switzerland are also practicing coaches

- Qualitative (linguistics and psychology) and quantitative (psychology) approaches to data (i.e. authentic processes)

QueSCo: Potential of a TD1 research project

- Developing a coaching-specific typology of questioning practices using TSPP model to address and relate…
  - '**what**' (i.e. a particular discursive practice under scrutiny (e.g. questions)
  - '**how**' (i.e. the sequential layout of e.g. questions)
  - '**how often**' (i.e. the frequency of e.g. questions)
  - '**where in the process**' (i.e. the phase in which e.g. questions occur)

  => The model can be used to investigate any coaching-typical discursive practice

QueSCo: Potential of a TD1 research project

- **Insights into local effectiveness**
  - Determining the transformative potential of questioning sequences (Peräkylä 2019)

- **Insights into global effectiveness**
  - Measurement with reduced and simplified Goal Attainment Scaling GAS (Spence 2007)

QueSCo: Potential of a TD1 research project

- Relating local and global effectiveness of coaching
  - Hypothesis: quantity of locally (un-) successful questioning sequences will be reflected onto global effectiveness of the process

- Insights into coaches' appropriate responsiveness decisions
  - Integration of professional knowledge based on current interactional needs

Thank you for your attention!

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