

*Authors' Note: This article was written as a way of introducing the work to psychotherapists.*

# THE CREATIVITY OF VOICE DIALOGUE: *Within a Psychotherapy Relationship*

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Voice Dialogue is a way of working with clients that creates change by shifting energy. This happens when the different inner parts of a person's personality are directly experienced through dialogue and a powerful capacity for centered choice is awakened. In this article, we would like to convey the creativity of this way of working with psychotherapy clients. Unfortunately, writing about an experiential method doesn't quite do it justice because the energetic component isn't present. As you continue reading, keep in mind, the magic is in the experience.

In traditional talk therapy, a client comes into your office and sits down across from you and talks about herself and her life. If you were to look at this same scenario through a Voice Dialogue lens, you would say a client comes into your office and sits down across from you and lets her many different inner selves talk about herself and her life.

With Voice Dialogue, the therapist/facilitator invites the different selves to speak one at a time. As you listen to your client, you might say – “Janice, it seems like you have two sides to your personality that are in conflict, a part that wants you to find another job and a part that doesn't want to leave what you already have. Would you like to speak from these parts and hear what they each think and feel? Voice Dialogue can help you know these parts of yourself and stay conscious of them as you make your decisions about your future.”

The beauty of using Voice Dialogue is that the client can hear directly from the inner selves and feel how each self offers a distinctly different energetic experience. The therapist becomes a facilitator, not trying to change anything but “holding” the process, asking questions that elicit each self's fuller story, including any particular thoughts, feelings, history, wants, needs, and body sensations.

As the facilitator, there is a protocol that you can learn that will support your holding of this experiential process and make it safer for the client's selves to come out and be heard. One important aspect is that when a self is going to talk, the client moves to another seat and gives that self its own space in the room. When that self is done talking, the client always returns to her original seat that is now referred to as the *Aware Ego*. From this center position the client has more awareness, more balance and more possibility of choices to draw upon.

Here is an example of an abbreviated Voice Dialogue facilitation with Janice, who is considering changing jobs.

**Facilitator:** Why don't you move over so I can talk to the part that wants change?

**Part that wants change:** (Moves to another seat.)

**Facilitator:** So you're the part of Janice that wants her to change jobs?

**Part that wants change:** Yes, I really want her to change jobs. That's not a good place for her to be. Her boss doesn't appreciate the job she does. He's always on her case about something, and doesn't recognize her talents because he feels threatened by her abilities.

**Facilitator:** Are you afraid at all?

**Part that wants change:** No, I like change. I think you have to change to get

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something better. And I believe in her, or (pause), I guess it's me I believe in. I know I can do it. I think what I'm actually afraid of is that Janice will listen to that other part and stay in this job and never change and I'll be left feeling this way forever.

**Facilitator:** Do you have any sense of how long you've been in her life?

**Part that wants change:** Well, (pause), I think I have been with her since she was very young. I am a very alive part of her. Sometimes I really think I am her. I'm happy and I've always been interested in learning new things. When her parents got a divorce when she was 10, she got very depressed, but that's another part of her, that's not me. Back then, I helped her adapt to the changes. Even today, I help her adapt and handle change. Have you noticed how life always has a lot of changes?

**Facilitator:** Yes, I have noticed that. What does the energy feel like in your body right now, as you sit and talk with me?

**Part that wants change:** It feels really good, really powerful. I feel alive, especially in my arms and legs. I can feel the energy right now.

**Facilitator:** Thank you for moving over and talking to me. I'm glad you are there for Janice. She needs you in her life and now it's going to be easier for her to know that you are always in her, available to be tapped into if she needs to adapt to new situations or wants to feel the aliveness and excitement about living that you hold for her.

Janice moves back to the center seat/Aware Ego position. The facilitator asks Janice to notice how the part's energy is still over there in the chair and they discuss this part from the vantage point of the Aware Ego position. Once this discussion has strengthened Janice's ability to see that as just a part of her, the facilitator asks Janice to move into the part that doesn't want to leave her current job.

**Facilitator:** So you're the part of Janice that doesn't want her to leave her job?

**Part that doesn't:** Yes. I just don't want her to, and I don't want you to try to convince me I should let her.

**Facilitator:** I agree with you. I definitely will not be trying to convince you to change your mind. Instead, I want to help Janice know what you think and feel about this idea of hers to change jobs.

**Part that doesn't:** Well, I am so comfortable there. I have lots of friends, and I would miss everyone. This is like a family for me. I don't mind that she's not appreciated by her boss. I care more about my co-workers. I enjoy them. I like the way we are friends and support each other.

**Facilitator:** Do you know how long you've been in her life?

**Part that doesn't:** I suppose I go way back into her childhood. I can remember being so incredibly sad when my parents divorced. Our family was never the same after that. My mom was so sad too. And I didn't get to see my dad that much after that.

**Facilitator:** That must have been really hard for you. How old were you when your parents divorced?

**Part that doesn't:** I think I was 10. You don't even know how sad it was. I can feel that feeling right now. Kind of like a heavy weight in center of my chest.

**Facilitator:** (holding the heaviness of that energy with her) Yes, I can feel what you mean. (Pause to just be with the energetic experience.) So you want to preserve the family feeling that you get at her work. And you want Janice to know that about you?

**Part that doesn't:** Yes, I want her to know that and remember me as she is weighing her decision. I want her to know that I like to form connections with people. I feel safer when I do that. I hope she doesn't change jobs, but if she does, I hope she picks one that has a family feeling for me.

**Facilitator:** Thank you for moving over and talking to me. Janice has been listening. You are a very important part of her, a part that really experienced the pain of her parent's divorce. She needs to listen to you too, and take good care of you if she decides to change jobs. You have a vulnerability about you that needs to be cared for.

**Part that doesn't:** Yes, I feel young as I sit here and talk to you. And I like what you just said. I do want her to take care of me as she makes this decision.

**Facilitator:** Thank you, and when you are ready, move back to the Aware Ego position.

The part moves back and the client and the facilitator again talk for a while so that Janice can live into this newly forming Aware Ego, which will give her a capacity for centered choice. The more time she can spend here, the more she'll develop her ability to live between these opposite selves and learn to access them as she makes choices in her life.

In Voice Dialogue, the selves are accepted and appreciated for who they are. A facilitator never sides with one part against another part, or judges, fixes or makes any part wrong. Change occurs when the client develops an awareness capacity to know her inner selves and develops an ability to stay separate enough from them to live in an Aware Ego process. She learns to hold the opposing selves in a dynamic tension, which supports integration and transformation.

The concept of an Aware Ego process is the most innovative aspect of Voice Dialogue. It is what distinguishes it from Gestalt Therapy in which the selves talk to each other and try to reconcile their differences. The experience of living within an Aware Ego process is similar to being the conductor of an orchestra. Voice Dialogue helps a person experience their inner selves so they can conduct and channel them through an Aware Ego process.

An Orchestra Conductor can creatively manage the full range of musicians in an orchestra. An Aware Ego process can creatively manage the full range of selves within a person's ever expanding personality. An Orchestra Conductor embraces all the different tones, sounds and vibrations available through the various musicians. An Aware Ego process embraces all the different thoughts, feelings and body sensations available through the various selves. An Orchestra Conductor leads the musicians, some to play solo, some to blend with others and some to be still, depending on the musical effect wanted. An Aware Ego process leads the selves so they can join in at different degrees, some more - some less, to be able to creatively meet the challenges of living and loving.

Voice Dialogue is compatible with most any psychological orientation. Its clinical uses vary depending on the presenting facts, the client's ego strength and

the clinician's training, experience and creativity.

Some basic uses are: 1) to help a client expand awareness by recognizing the different selves that come forth in regard to a particular life issue, 2) to support a client in letting go of negative behavior patterns by opening to new selves that can create the desired change, 3) to give voice to the different figures that show up in a night or daydream and as symbols in a sand tray, 4) to guide a client into managing an out-of-control critic, 5) to enhance a client's spiritual awareness with direct experience of transpersonal energy, and 6) to be used in relationship work, when a couple is polarized and each person needs to open to a disowned self that lives more dominantly in the other person. And in every case, Voice Dialogue can be used to help a client grow beyond their "either/or" mindset into the limitless creativity of "both/and" thinking.



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