

Dialogue

Background: Dr. David Bohm is generally considered to be the founder of modern dialogue. His article titled "**Dialogue: A Proposal**" was used as a principle source for this paper.

"The word "dialogue"," Bohm writes, "is derived from two roots: "dia" which means "through" and "logos" which means "the word", or more particularly, "the meaning of the word."" The term was used to describe a process intended to create a coherent culture of shared meaning within a group.

Dialogue (aka – Salon) is intended to interrupt and extend thought processes to allow individuals to see and understand how they think about a subject and are predisposed to a certain path based on boundaries set by conditioned manifestations of learning, feelings, emotions, intentions and desires. In essence **thought**, in our use, **is the active response of memory in every phase of life.** Virtually **all** of our **knowledge is** produced, displayed, communicated, transformed and **applied in thought.**

Rational thinking are responses conditioned and biased by previous thought. If we look carefully at what we generally take to be reality we begin to see that it includes a collection of concepts, memories and reflexes colored by our personal needs, fears, and desires, all of which are limited and distorted by the boundaries of language and the habits of our history, sex and culture. **The question is, are our perceptions of reality at all accurate?**

Thought itself conceals the answer to this problem from our immediate awareness. In fact it **generates a sense that how we interpret the world is the only sensible way in which it can be interpreted.** What is needed is a means by which we can slow down the process of thought in order to be able to observe it while it is actually occurring to

uncover the structures that drive our conclusions.

Our physical bodies have a capability called proprioception. This is defined as a feedback mechanism that senses the position, location, orientation and movement of the body and its parts, aka - kinesthesia. Raise an arm and we know by feel and sight that it is raised. But, a feedback mechanism like this is lacking in the realm of thought. When we think of something we have no automatic way to confirm that we thought it or what influenced our thought.

Dialogue creates the opportunity for each participant to examine the preconceptions, prejudices and the characteristic patterns that lie behind his or her thoughts, opinions, beliefs and feelings.

It is concerned with providing a space to display thought and meaning that makes possible a kind of collective proprioception or immediate mirroring back of both the content of thought and the dynamic structures that govern it.

Dialogue is not concerned with trying to change behavior, nor to get the participants to move toward a predetermined goal. Nevertheless, changes do occur because observed thought behaves differently from unobserved thought.

Dialogue is Not

The popularity of dialogue has given rise to an increasingly inappropriate use of the term. It is not discussion, debate, or a new form of T-groups, or sensitivity training.

Dialogue, while it is not intended, may have psychotherapeutic consequences with some. Anytime you generate understanding and communications on a deeper level, emotional blocks will fall and changes will often result from the increased understanding and fellowship.

Rules for Dialogue

Suspension of impulses, and judgments, during a session by the participants lies at the very heart of dialogue. As one of its most important aspects it involves closer attention, listening and examining ones self as essential skills to the exploration.

Suspension exposes your reactions, impulses, feelings and opinions so they can be seen and felt within your own psyche and can be reflected back by others in the group. It does not mean repressing, suppressing or, even, postponing them. It means giving them your serious attention so that their structures can be noticed. **If you give attention to strong feelings the attention to the thought process will tend to slow it down permitting you to see the deeper meanings underlying your thoughts and to sense incoherent structures of action you might otherwise carry out automatically.**

Numbers of Participants A Dialogue works best with between twenty and forty people seated facing one another in a single circle. Size allows for the observation of different subgroups or subcultures that can reveal ways in which thought operates collectively. This is important because subcultures are often an unrecognized cause of failed communication and conflict.

Duration Because it is an unfamiliar process dialogue needs time to get going. It requires an introduction to describe the process. Even with the intro groups will often experience confusion, frustration, and self-conscious concern. Some find that a 2 hour session is about optimum. Dialogue is more concerned with exploring the social constructs and inhibitions that affect our communications.

Leadership A dialogue is essentially a conversation between equals. At least one or, preferably two, experienced facilitators are essential. Leaders are participants just like everybody else. Guidance, when necessary, should take the form of "leading

from behind". Dialogue is vulnerable to being manipulated but its spirit is not consistent with this.

Subject Matter Dialogue can begin with any topic of interest to the participants. If some subjects are disturbing or not appropriate it is important that members express these thoughts within the Dialogue. No content should be excluded.

Often participants will gossip or express their frustration with the superficiality, good manners or dinner party conversation after the initial conversation but it is exactly this sort of material that offers the most fertile ground for moving the dialogue into deeper realms of meaning and coherence.

Dialogue in Organizations In an existing organization the Dialogue will very probably have to begin with an exploration of all the doubts and fears that participation will certainly raise. Members may have to begin with a fairly specific agenda from which they eventually can be encouraged to diverge. Just remember that no content should be excluded because the impulse to exclude a subject is itself rich material for the inquiry.

Resources:

http://www.muc.de/~heuvel/dialogue/dialogue_proposal.html

Bohm on Dialogue

<http://www.muc.de/~heuvel/dialogue/>

American Philosophical Practitioners Association

<http://www.appa.edu/groupfacil.htm#one>

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation <http://thataway.org/resources/understand/what.html>

www.FacilitationCenter.com

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