

Learning Enrichment Activity

Dialogue Session

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What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is deeply intuitive; sensing self and sensing the group. It raises the bar for innovative communication. How? Check in with yourself; listen for the “music.”

When is Dialogue Appropriate?

- Complex issue that needs to be explored
- Issues we care about
- Issues that affect strategies, future, etc
- Desire for deeper connection and community
- To explore structural source of behavior and results

When is Dialogue NOT Appropriate?

- Need for quick decision
- Need to converge, reach agreement
- Non-strategic decisions

Guidelines for Dialogue:

- Recognition and suspension of assumptions
- Spirit of inquiry and openness
- Deep listening to self and others

Example - A dialogue session would be useful to discuss teacher/student relationships.

Rules in Dialogue:

- Speak to the “center” of the group, to the “common ground” not to a particular person.
- Speak from the “I.”
 - “My experience is...”
 - “The thought that comes to me is...”
 - “As Alan spoke, I found myself thinking...”
- Allow silence of at least five seconds between speakers (that’s one Mississippi, two Mississippi, etc.) – silence often signals that people are thinking.
- Allow other people’s words to sit without rebuttal, judgment or embellishment as they were spoken.
- Receive and digest the observations and feelings of others without analyzing, judging (negatively or positively) or fixing.
- Speak only when you feel compelled. If it’s already been said, it has been said on behalf of us all.

How to Listen During Dialogue (or anytime):

(Senge, et al., 1995, p.391)

1. Stop talking – to others and to yourself. Learn to still the voice within. You can’t listen if you are talking.
2. Imagine the other person’s viewpoint. Picture yourself in her position, doing her work, facing her problems, using her language and having her values.
3. Look, act and be interested.
4. Observe nonverbal behavior, like body language, to glean meanings beyond what is said to you.
5. Don’t interrupt. Sit still past your tolerance level.
6. Listen between the lines for implicit meanings as well as explicit ones.
7. Speak only affirmatively while listening. Resist the temptation to jump in with an evaluative, critical or disparaging comment at the moment a remark is uttered.
8. To ensure understanding, rephrase what the other person has just told you at key points in the conversation. Yes, I know this is the old “active listening” technique, but it works – and how often do you do it?
9. Stop talking. This is the first and last because all other techniques of listening depend on it. Take a vow of silence once in a while.

Tools in Dialogue:

All participants sit in a circle, either on the floor or at a table so that they can see each other.

The facilitator also sits in the circle and completely reviews the rules that will be followed throughout the session. The “check-in” begins where the facilitator, using a “koosh” ball explains how he/she feels about participating in the session. The facilitator then hands it to each person around the circle. Participants can only speak when they have the koosh ball. They can say “pass” if they don’t want to share.

Once everyone has checked in, the “problem” is explained. Thoughts are shared *only* when participants have the koosh ball. They indicate when they want it by waving a hand. The session may last as short as 30 minutes or as long as an hour. The facilitator keeps time and makes sure all *stay in a dialog mode not a decision making mode*. At the end, everyone must “check out” by sharing how they felt about the session.

Topic: Diversity in the Classroom

- It is one of the most important issues educators face in classrooms today.
- How do educators deal with it?
- What is missing when dealing with different cultures?
- Remember, the goal is to come to a better understanding of a topic, *not* to make a decision.