
Ellen Schoenfeld-Beeks
University of Massachusetts Boston

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cct_capstone

Recommended Citation
http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cct_capstone/278

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Critical and Creative Thinking Program at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Critical and Creative Thinking Capstones Collection by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact library.uasc@umb.edu.
THE CASE FOR DIALOGUE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION:
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING THROUGH
THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

A Thesis Presented

by

ELLEN SCHOENFELD-BEEKS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of the University of Massachusetts Boston in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

SEPTEMBER 1995

Critical and Creative Thinking Program
THE CASE FOR DIALOGUE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: 
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING THROUGH 
THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

A Thesis Presented
by
ELLEN SCHOENFELD-BEEKS

Approved as to style and content by:

Lynn Dhority, Ph.D.
Chairperson of the Committee

Rosalind Cochrane, Ph.D.
Member

John R. Murray, Ed.D.
Member

John R. Murray, Ed.D., Director
Critical and Creative Thinking Program
I extend heartfelt thanks to Lynn Dhority for initiating the course in the Dialogue Process as part of the Critical and Creative Thinking Program in the Spring of 1993. This course became a laboratory for my own personal development of critical and creative thinking processes. His approach to teaching Dialogue through modeling it was personally empowering and enlightening.

I wish to extend life-long thanks to Rosalind Cochrane for her invaluable comments, nurturing spirit and generosity of time, all of which contributed immensely to bringing essential clarity to this work. The dialogues Rosalind and I had around the development of our ten-week course in Dialogue for Women and the continuing weekly dialogue sessions with others have provided significant opportunities to deepen my understanding and integration of the spirit of dialogue.

In this regard I would like to personally thank Anne McDonough and Marie Kenerson, classmates in the first Dialogue course, for contributing to my personal development and practice of Dialogue by virtue of their own learning and practice.

I am also grateful for the time and efforts shown to me by John Murray. His insightful and thoughtful comments have helped pinpoint specific connections between dialogue and education.

I have a final and most appreciative word of thanks for my family, Heather, Elizabeth and Jonathan, for their patience and support during the final stages of this thesis.
and to my husband, David, for his technical expertise and ever-ready helpfulness and encouragement. In addition, I wish to give special thanks to Mark Flapan, whose willingness in the initial stages of this project to listen and inquire into the nature of my ideas inspired and helped focus this work.

I dedicate this thesis in memory of Richard Beeks, my father, who understood, valued and practiced collaborative leadership in his administrative work at Chaffey College. As a professional musician my father knew the way jazz ensembles worked, thus his style of leadership as an administrator reflected a value for collaboration and an atmosphere that respected and honored multiple perspectives and initiatives.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Elva Jeffries Beeks, and in memory of Alma Marquis Jeffries, my grandmother, in appreciation for their love of all things natural including the love we have shared for our family cabin, a sustaining memory of spiritual strength and family closeness.
THE CASE FOR DIALOGUE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION:
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING THROUGH
THE DIALOGUE PROCESS
SEPTEMBER 1995
ELLEN SCHOENFELD-BEEKS, B. A., UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
SANTA BARBARA; M. A. T. IN READING, LA VERNE COLLEGE, CALIFORNIA;
M. A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON
Directed by: Professor Lynn Dhority

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the theoretical and conceptual elements of
the Dialogue process in the context of our present and pressing need for dynamic
educational organization and reform. The Dialogue process provides an approach for
shifting consciousness. Dialogue is thus reviewed as a vehicle for creating learning and
transformation in individuals and groups by cultivating individual capacities to shift from
a Newtonian-objective reality to a post-modern systems worldview. Such a paradigm shift
is relevant for understanding the underlying theory fundamental to constructivist practices,
for integrating transformational thinking skills into curricula, and for creating the kind of
collaborative environment and leadership necessary for cultural changes that improve
teaching and learning.

Learning and practicing new ways of speaking, listening and thinking develops
greater individual and collective mind/body awareness. Thus, Dialogue provides a practicing context useful for uncovering the underlying assumptions and presuppositions that serve as barriers to our individual and collective learning. Dialogue is a process by which individuals can develop a capacity to be in "learning space," an internal orientation toward learning and generative thinking as opposed to "reacting" mindlessly from assumed (previously learned) positions of "certainty."

This thesis also explores the scientific underpinnings for Dialogue found in quantum theory and the philosophy of the Dialogue process as proposed by quantum physicist David Bohm. The current Dialogue literature is reviewed and together with the writer's own Dialogue experience provides an overview for those interested in the application of Dialogue's wholistic, systemic and relational principles to educational reform.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................................................. iv  
ABSTRACT......................................................................................................... vi  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION.................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE...............</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE THEORETICAL BASIS FOR DIALOGUE........................</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue as Social Application of a Paradigm Shift.................</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shifting Paradigm.........................................................</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Theory..........................................................................</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue as a Process for Change in the Post-Modern Era.........</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of the Word <em>Dialogue</em>..........................................</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Breakdown in Communication..........................................</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Structure of Thought.....................................................</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Elements in the Dialogue Process..........................</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on thoughts as they occur..................................</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generative learning through participation...........................</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating a field for insight............................................</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding group tension and moving into shared meaning...........</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii
The process of educational change in modern society is so complex that the greatest initial need is to comprehend its dynamics. Michael Fullan in *The New Meaning of Educational Change*

The current literature on educational change as surveyed and compiled by Michael Fullan indicates that the best pathways for successful change and educational improvement are found in school cultures which are collaborative and learning oriented.

Virtually every research study on the topic has found this to be the case. And it does make sense in terms of the theory of change... Significant educational change consists of changes in beliefs, teaching style, and materials, which can come about only through a process of personal development in a social context. (Fullan 1991, 132)

Fullan concludes that teachers need skill-training workshops, but they also need time to interact and "converse about the meaning of change" (132). He believes that given the merit of the "primacy of personal contact" (132) teachers can fully and reliably determine the value of innovations and design an implementation strategy.

We have entered the post-modern era, where much of our current reform is based on constructivist theory of learning and knowledge (Brooks and Brooks 1993), and thus reflects a paradigm shift from the traditional practice of teacher-centered education to practices that help learners transform and internalize new information. Constructivists view the true mission of education as valuing and honoring the "multiplicity of truths and
options" (Brooks and Brooks, 111). However, teachers are asked to adopt "new perspectives on instruction" (121) while being simultaneously and paradoxically rebuked for requests to address their own needs of restructuring and program adoption. "In effect, educators are being told to respond to external stimuli while stifling their own inner perspectives" (41). In addition, although research demonstrates that teachers are most receptive to innovation when presented with practical programs to consider (Brooks and Brooks; Fullan), putting priority on practical application may lead teachers both to bypass a true understanding of constructivist theory and to misconstrue specific understandings that stand behind a particular practical application.

[Un]less teachers are given ample opportunities to learn in constructivist settings and construct for themselves educational visions through which they can reflect on educational practices the instructional programs they learn will be trivialized into "cookbook" procedures. (Brooks and Brooks, 121-122)

Research on effective management of multiple innovations in a school indicates that real change, change that improves teaching and learning, is correlated with learning-enriched school cultures (Fullan, 133).

Principals and teacher-leaders actively fostered collegial involvement: "Collective commitment to student learning in collaborative settings directs the definition of leadership toward those colleagues who instruct as well as inspire, awakening all sorts of teaching possibilities in others." In effective schools, collaboration is linked with norms and opportunities for continuous improvement and career-long learning: "It is assumed that improvement in teaching is a collective rather than individual enterprise, and that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve." (Fullan, 134)

If the pathway for continuous professional learning can be found in providing learning-enriched schools, how do we facilitate the construction of such a path? What does
it mean to build a "learning community" (Kofman and Senge 1993)? What are the issues
and opportunities for individual members of a learning-enriched school? What is
leadership's new role in facilitating change? How can individuals assist
learning-impoverished climates in their daily interactions? These are questions of a timely
nature in the present era of educational reform because such questions address our
collective capacity to work together as a team of learners. Yet we find ourselves in a
society that espouses cooperation while it practices competition. Given this gap between
what we say we value and what our actions purport, is it not surprising that our task and
challenge is learning how to learn together?

I believe that learning and practicing a Dialogue process can contribute substantially
to our understanding of what it means to change, not merely as individuals, but as
groups, because the Dialogue process speaks in new ways to our own individual
responsibilities for creating safe places for learning and interaction.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the nature and significance of Dialogue for
educational organizations: Dialogue is seen as a vehicle for creating learning and transfor-
mation in individuals and groups through the development of an internal "learning space."
By "learning space" I mean a disposition and direction whose purpose is to be reflective
and open to learning and changing and that is watchful of one's own reactions. My aim is
to provide a fresh perspective for how people might work in a group setting by focusing on
their own individual learning process. Learning and practicing a Dialogue process
provides a means of developing greater mindfulness or awareness as to the assumptions
underlying one's own thinking, feeling, speaking and listening. Each individual's capacity
to be in learning space factors directly into a group's capacity for collective growth and movement.

As a methodology the Dialogue process can shift consciousness. By learning and practicing new ways of speaking, listening and thinking, people can develop greater individual and collective awareness. By slowing down the communication process which frees our capacity for inquiry, curiosity and compassion, we can learn to notice thoughts and reactions, to listen deeply to ourselves and others and to develop clarity into the underlying assumptions and opinions in the communication of ourselves and others. Dialogue is a process by which individuals can develop a sense of being in "learning space" or "creating mode" (Kofman and Senge, 7). This space is internal and fragile, susceptible to all kinds of perceived threats to self, and it swings easily from openness to judgement, closure, certainty, defensiveness or violence. Developing the capacity to be in "learning space" is a journey of exploration into the structure of language itself. A Dialogue process offers us one way of becoming more aware of unconscious learned thought processes (hidden beliefs and assumptions we have unconsciously adopted and that mindlessly drive our thinking) at the individual and collective level. Building awareness can thereby allow individuals to become less restricted by unconscious learned thought processes and less reactive to them and thus more creatively receptive to new and varied opinions and ideas.

One of the most fascinating aspects of serving for seven years on my local school committee was learning about the multidimensional nature of educational change. I have always been intrigued with the problems inherent in the implementation of new designs and the barriers to collegial collaboration presented by a hierarchical system. The culture
that I saw in my school system (which was predominately hierarchical) was collaborative in some ways, but it was also fragmented. Therefore, conversations of a meaningful and collegial nature were rarely present between the different educational constituencies and little was learned about the perspectives of others. Even when intergroup relations were fostered there was no guarantee that people would ‘check’ their role at the door in order to enter into the conversation based on broader self-interest. For example, when the science department of the high school was asked to consider making changes in the ninth grade science curriculum, they discussed issues for some time between themselves and the coordinator but came to no decision. When the coordinator died, the principal (one up in the hierarchy) became the coordinator. He conducted several meetings in which he made decisions based on what the superintendent (up from him in the hierarchy) wanted. Parents and students complained vehemently in a meeting arranged by the superintendent for the defense of decisions. When the school committee proposed they vote on the decision, the superintendent convinced committee members that curriculum issues were no longer their purview. As members of the school committee, we knew how the students and parents felt, but faculty opinion was always filtered through the superintendent. In this often repeated kind of scenario, hierarchy of opinions prevails over understandings that are commonly left undeveloped.

The Dialogue process offers a communication vehicle the educational community could begin to use to pursue just such needed "learningful" (Senge 1990, 4) conversations that inquire into the heart of things. These conversations are deeper than ordinary opinion-sharing; rather, they are focused on examining the whole of an issue by looking at how
each person is conceiving it. For a group to think with this wholistic orientation, we must look to changing *individual* thinking and learning. This paper proposes that the Dialogue process accomplishes this through exploring individual patterns of learned thought and patterns of defensive interactions that prevent learning in the first place. I will explore the theory of a Dialogue process, the need for its use in education, and its potential to transform individual and collective perception and learning through the personal development of a "learning space," a metaphorical "space" of reflection and non-reactivity that facilitates continuous learning in groups as well as individuals.

Chapter II presents the rationale for the use of a Dialogue process in public education. Chapter III and IV discuss the theoretical and practical concepts involved in Dialogue. The former reviews the scientific underpinnings of quantum theory as it influences a shift in our perceptions from discrete parts to a systems worldview. David Bohm's work that merges quantum physics with philosophy opens possibilities of a dialogue process for change in the post-modern era. This chapter is followed by a review of recent concepts of dialogue since the theory of David Bohm. Chapter V explores specific personal learning in Dialogue through development of being in a "learning space," thus bringing about an individual shift in paradigm that can undergird the creative potential Dialogue offers for learning to think in new ways together in working groups.
For all their imagination, school reformers are at a loss to tell us how to get from the schools we have to the schools they envision. And there's the rub. Maybe because we are a product-oriented culture, we tend to neglect process. Whatever the reason, there is certainly a dearth of good thinking about the process of changing the schools. How do you get the ball rolling? How do you build interest? How do you build consensus? How do you persuade the opposition? How do you cut through red tape? Where do you get the money? How do you change attitudes? And how do you do all this in an ethical way? These are the questions that chiefly concern somebody trying to make real change in a real school. The questions are not educational in nature. They are political. Maybe that is why educationists have neglected them.

James Nehring

In my opinion, as a parent, teacher and former school committee member, public schools are perceived by many as failing to thrive. Failure to thrive is a result of how we address change and innovation. "Grappling with educational change in self-defeating ways has been the model experience over the last 30 years" (Fullan 1991, 345). Research has pinpointed various causes for this: bias in ignoring needs (Fullan), leadership that is controlling (Glasser1994), innovation designed in academia without the cross-fertilization for the design of implementation by practitioners, and the lack of opportunity to make meaning of the plethora of changes and innovation that cross the school desk (Fullan), skepticism of parents to innovation which they have seen come and go without an impact (Willis 1995), and lack of ongoing and evaluative support for programs once they were
implemented (Fullan). It has been said that the average life of a business organization is 40 years unless it exists within a learning environment. According to Peter Senge, a leader in organizational learning and development, organizations, including educational ones, do not foster learning. Instead, they are overrun with built-in defensive patterns and faulty reasoning that actually serve to inhibit learning. We can infer that our public school system, had it been a business, would have been dead long ago due to its institutional failure to engage students and teachers in continuously meaningful learning processes; but, public schools have a monopoly, and are culturally sanctioned even if partially dead. Fortunately, promising research in educational change and organizational development can contribute to our understanding of the change process in organizations and what the process of change implies for individuals in the educational community.

In a pluralistic society there will always be pressure to change (Fullan). Multilevel reform initiatives attempt to manifest from many levels of local, state and federal sources. Such initiatives rarely take root, but when they do we can begin to see an emerging pattern of necessary and sufficient thinking that can lay the groundwork for successful reform. How we respond to this pressure to change, however, is the challenge of the educational community. Michael Fullan, author of *The New Meaning of Educational Change* summarizes three critical lessons indicating that successful reform entails more than just a superficial change in procedures and the wrangling over financial allocations.

First, change is multidimensional and can vary accordingly within the same person as well as within groups. Second, there are some deep changes at stake, once we realize that people's basic conception of education and skills are involved—that is, their occupational identity, their sense of competence, and their self-concept. The need and difficulty for individuals to develop a sense of meaning about change is manifest. Third, compounding the
second lesson is the fact that change consists of a sophisticated and none-too-clear dynamic interrelationship of the three dimensions of change [materials, teaching approach, and beliefs]. Beliefs guide and are informed by teaching strategies and activities; the effective use of materials depends on their articulation with beliefs and teaching approaches and so on. Many innovations entail changes in some aspects of educational beliefs, teaching behavior, use of materials, and more. Whether or not people develop meaning in relation to all three aspects is fundamentally the problem. (Pullan, 42)

Whether or not the culture of a school fosters the making of this kind of meaning is the responsibility of a new style of leadership that is not afraid to collectively address the hard questions raised by educational reform initiatives. Ronald Heifetz, psychiatrist, cellist, and instructor of leadership education methods at the Kennedy School of Government develops the idea of this new leadership as primarily adaptive in nature. He believes the adaptive style has been expressed by women for years; unlike men, he asserts, women have not been in a position to misconstrue leadership with authority (which women haven’t had). Leadership is really the work of adapting to the needs of the era, at present characterized as “jarring change” by Sharon Daloz Parks, a senior research fellow. In understanding adaptive leadership, our present leaders need to be aware of what we have learned from our past practices and traditions and what new learning will be required. Heifetz sees our past national presidents as having enacted deeply ingrained and cultural stereotypes of leadership such as the lone ranger (one person with a vision and everyone else follows) or the charismatic person (knower of answers, destination, and direction). Often people look to leaders for easy answers; they wish for them to maintain social equilibrium. However, Heifetz points out that in times of transition leadership must leave familiar territory and enter the unchartered waters of ongoing adaptive change and unknown outcomes. Leadership in times of transition needs to focus less on homeostasis
People see harmony as consisting solely of consonance. But harmony is actually the thoughtful weaving together of dissonance with consonance. The point of dissonance is that it generates movement in music; it gives us dynamism. (Heifetz, 32)

The new style of leadership in organizations is less likely to be modeled after an orchestra conductor, whose role involves considerable authority. Organizations compare better to an improvisational jazz ensemble, since they need to "construct new directions and authority structures---where they have to invent the score as the music is being played" (33). In a jazz ensemble musicians must listen carefully to each other, and within musical stretches certain soloists stand out. "There's latitude for surprise, and the interplay can generate inspiring moments of creativity" (33). Today's demands of society require our ability to adapt, to change, and thus, a leader must not be afraid to ask the tough question: "What are the conflicts that are already here, and how do we set them in a productive dialogue with each other?" (32). No waiting for revelation or requests should deter individuals from participating as leaders in such mutual dialoguing. "One may lead without more than a question in hand" (33).

Our current circumstances in implementing educational reform fail to provide the cohesion seen in a jazz ensemble, where the whole is assumed to be greater than the sum of its parts. Instead, friction and frustration over educational reform is the common picture, as indicated in Nehring's quote beginning this chapter. Educators struggle unsuccessfully to participate in this process of reform in a way relevant to all our needs.

Thus, our attention to the need for educational reform reflects our potential for
success but also reflects the obstacles that stand in our way. In order to become a cohesive jazz ensemble, we must acknowledge that the journey of educational reform is not the story of a single expedition. Educational reform is a journey that includes many people; everyone brings their own map, explores in their own way, and reaches their own conclusions. The map of a teacher differs from the map of a superintendent, and even the collective maps of all the teachers are not congruent. Exploring the educational terrain with others requires cooperation, but our different maps create frustration and tension. Some explorers respond by withdrawing from tension, hoping to escape its influence, while others defend the "rightness" of their map. The one with most authority ends up as "winner." That map is proclaimed THE map. However, because one map reflects only one single set of assumptions, the exploration of educational reform becomes immediately narrowed and flawed.

What if, instead, the expedition set out to develop an understanding of all the maps? What if everyone in the expedition began with a new assumption that understanding how to explore educational reform would emerge from a gradual process of understanding how the terrains and roads on the maps were interconnected and interdependent? What if everyone turned to each other with inherent wonder and curiosity to learn about how the varying maps were constructed in the first place?

The sad consequences of not being able to come together and talk about our individual maps and how they are created are reflected in both parent skepticism and mandated change. Resistance to change in public education is systemic. Despite efforts of the Department of Education (DOE) and the Massachusetts School Committee Association
(MASC) to develop collaborative efforts for change, educational reform continuously bangs into walls of resistance. Forced change is usually no change at all. Yet releasing the pressure only clears the field for the status quo to snap back into place. "If you restructure the system without restructing people's attitudes, wait a little while and you'll see the same old system reassert itself" (Nehring 1992, 57). Our characteristic resistance to change escapes no role; superintendents, school committees, teachers and administrators, parents and students can all dig in their heels. To this, all of us respond with frustration.

My own experience as a teacher, parent and former member of a school committee tends to support the claim that people do not resist change, they resist being told to change. In other words real change, change that really works, comes from within. Extrinsic motivators (mandates from the state or orders from a principal) are likely to meet with compromising "compliance": "That's why changes imposed from the top fail. They offer mechanical reorganization while failing to address deeply rooted assumptions" (57). This thesis explores a new methodology for uncovering and shifting such hidden, and yet, deeply rooted assumptions.

Public education desperately needs a new atmosphere, one where individuals, administrators, teachers, students and parents can collaborate, collectively learn and inquire, yet one that remains safe for individual expression. So far, few people know how to deal meaningfully with their differences. As a result, we have constructed win-lose frameworks that create atmospheres hostile to individual expression and initiation---atmospheres that defend differences and shut down learning opportunities. Collectively, there is a lack of openness to multiple perspectives and an inability to see
things on different levels simultaneously. Individuals lack the capacity to hold their own vision and at the same time hold a will to learn, a willingness to be changed, and an openness to others. "This kind of learning," writes Jon Kabat-Zinn, Director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, "requires a lifelong commitment to continual inquiry and a willingness to modify your perspective as you acquire new knowledge and arrive at new levels of understanding and insight" (Kabat-Zinn 1990, 150). This kind of learning extends beyond what Richard Paul refers to as critical thinking in the strong sense. It refers to critical thinking without regard to and beyond egocentric needs and desires. This is learning that goes beyond being fair-minded; it is learning from a different perspective, the perspective of the whole instead of a limited perspective of the parts.

The essence of our problem seems to be in our communication with each other. We seem to have developed patterns of communication that are not "learningful" (Senge) or empathic, but instead communication that actually disempowers:

In modern living, the major threats come not from the physical world but from other people; it is people who make us feel vulnerable, from early childhood and on throughout life. If one could turn readily to other people in seeking to deal with these feelings, if one could do this repeatedly with faith and ease, there would be many more chances of productively dealing with life. (Miller 1986, 38)

George Prince, in his book *The Mind-Free Program*, suggests that individuals seem to act without conscious awareness of feeling threatened and disempowered; and, that instead of advocating from a conscious understanding of our vulnerability, we react mindlessly to this threat to our sense of self by revengefully reciprocating our disempowerment upon others. Thus we become both the victim and the perpetrator of unproductive communication.
Simply stated, our problem in education is to create an environment where people feel safe and will actually turn to one another in respect and compassion so they can learn from each other in new wholistic ways. Learning and inquiry need to be experienced collectively; that is, building together a shared understanding of each others’ meaning can be utilized to create a new state of consciousness at the group level.

Learning and inquiry are also basic to constructivist theory. In constructivist classrooms teachers and students engage in interactions designed to help "students search for their own understandings rather than follow other people’s logic" (Brooks and Brooks 1993, 118). The purpose of teaching is to design inquiries for students that "challenge students’ present conceptions" (113) and "encourage discussions of hypotheses and perspectives" (112) that require the use of thinking skills in a group. Teachers who pose questions with the "orientation that there is only one correct response" (110) cannot expect students "to develop either the interest in or the analytical skills necessary for more diverse modes of inquiry" (110).

The multi-perspective emphasis of constructivist theory should not be confined to the classroom or to students. This is a model for building professional learning and knowledge in day to day interactions as well and, like the classroom, requires active use of thinking skills in dialogical environments. Such environments can serve to facilitate conversation around "hypotheses" and "perspectives" of professional concern. Dialogical environments allow professional conversations to reach new levels of interaction and learning, but this requires a capacity to distance oneself from one’s own strongly held opinion in order to really hear without judging the multi-perspectives of others which can
then inform one's own learning and change. In constructivist theory learning and knowledge progress as a dynamic process of finding new meaning, perpetually open to learning and change.

In my own experience a common example of fragmentation in the educational system consists of pointing the finger of reform at the classroom teacher, while simultaneously neglecting the deeper meaning of change implied for the entire culture of the school system as a whole. Thus, my personal experience parallels the research findings as set forth by Fullan.

In order to create collaborative learning environments, we need to understand what is happening in our present patterns of communication and how it might be possible to engage ourselves more fruitfully in individual and collective inquiry along with learning throughout the school. David Bohm, quantum physicist and philosopher, has proposed a collective learning methodology that speaks directly to our educational needs. He suggests that our present way of looking at the world, as separate and disconnected parts, contributes to the fragmented nature of our thinking and thus, solutions dependent upon such thinking are bound to fail. According to Bohm, our perception of our world is based upon the structure of our thought, and through dialogue Bohm attempts to address the nature of thought directly. Dialogue is a methodology designed to transform our way of being in the world through transforming our thought. This is accomplished in large measure by becoming aware of how our learned thought processes act as barriers to new learning and insight. In the words of Octavia Paz, "Dialogue is but one of the forms, perhaps the highest, of cosmic sympathy" (in Mathews, 46).
CHAPTER III

THE THEORETICAL BASIS FOR DIALOGUE

Dialog as Social Application of a Paradigm Shift

The Shifting Paradigm.

*Today there is a wide measure of agreement...*
that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality;
the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine.

James Jeans as quoted in *The Turning Point*

The Dialogue process has emerged in an era of shifting paradigms. We move toward a world that can be described as a system, a web of interdependence and connectivity, and a quantum reality, a web that no longer separates the rational from the intuitive, the observer from the observed. Words like organic, holistic, and ecological are characteristic of this new worldview. The recent paradigm results from research in atomic physics that points toward new philosophical underpinnings and new perceptions of reality. Bohm drew analogies between quantum processes and human thought processes. According to Fritjof Capra (1982), author of *The Turning Point*, quantum theory will have profound consequences on the way we interpret reality.

Bohm asserts that our previous traditional Cartesian paradigm, symbolized by Descartes' celebrated "Cogito, ergo sum"—"I think, therefore I exist"—sent us down a
developmental fork in the road. Since the Cartesian model separates mind from body, it emphasizes the rational mind over intuition. Bohm believes that this split ultimately results in fragmenting our entire being, sacrificing our sense of wholeness. He suggests that we have begun our pendulum swing back toward more balance between mind and body (mind/body) into concepts that reflect the inseparable nature of the two. Thus, we are in the process of moving away from the limitations of this traditional model which understands predominately through a rational, mechanistic, and Newtonian lens. Instead, we are expanding our worldview to accommodate more accurately the phenomena we observe as external reality.

Classical physics seen in Newton’s world led us to describe the world in terms of discrete parts. Motivated by an emphasis on the material and measurable world, we sought to discover increasingly smaller constituents of matter as the basis of our research. In Newtonian minds nature is reduced to fundamental entities, constants, laws and equations. Danah Zohar refers to “our Western preoccupation with singularity and simplicity, of our passion for clarity and our distrust of ambiguity” (Zohar 1994, 139), as a vital motivation behind our more mechanistic worldview. The properties and interactions between what we define as fundamental building blocks were the vehicles through which all of nature became knowable. The world was seen as an objective reality, one that was understood through its physical attributes and their interactions. Here, no paradoxes were present, but rather just puzzles that had mechanical solutions waiting to be discovered.

Paradigms will begin to shift when enough people recognize enough evidence that cannot fit an accepted model of understanding, that is, what we understand through our
present set assumptions (Kuhn). At the turn of the century discoveries in atomic research
stunned the scientific community, becoming new bases that would slowly change our
world views. Experiments designed to measure certain phenomena as waves, measured
waves. Experiments on the same substance designed to measure particles, somehow
always measured particles instead, leading researchers to conclude that somehow, what
they were looking for influenced what they got. Such discoveries challenged the
underlying assumptions of classical Newtonian physics based on the assumption that
objects were either 'this' or 'that'. After experiments began to show evidence to the
contrary, scientists had to restructure their view of reality to make sense of this new
evidence. In studying the very small and the very fast, scientists found that they could not
predict with certainty whether the properties of these substances would react as particles or
as waves. "The connections between events on this level of physical reality are only
describable by probability" (Kabat-Zinn 1990, 195). The new reality suggested, however,
that seemingly contradictory qualities can coexist in this new reality that contains elements
of uncertainty and ambiguity. Instead of thinking with an orientation of either /or,
scientists began to propose an orientation of both/and.

Such subatomic research began at the turn of the century and presently continues
as an attempt to unify quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity into a complete
theory of subatomic particles. Capra believes that one unifying theory, the S-matrics
theory contains important implications for science as a whole. The philosophical
underpinning of the S-matrix theory is known as the bootstrap approach, proposed by
Geoffrey Chew in the early 1960's. Scientists have used bootstrap theory to support a
comprehensive theory of strongly interacting particles and a general philosophy of nature. According to Arnold Mindell, a Jungian therapist, the bootstrap theory claims that there are no permanent constants in life and the term bootstrap is used to "unify related theories of nature in such a way that even though the theories are not the same, they are mutually consistent with one another" (Mindell 1992, 70).

The word quantum refers to an energy packet that moves through space in indeterminate and exploratory leaps. Such an idea does not reflect a world of common sense as we know it. It is a world of energy at the subatomic level that moves for no apparent reason to no apparent place. It is not, however, a place without order, but the order that moves it is indeterminate. Particles and their interactions are viewed in terms of a requirement of self-consistency. This order of self-consistency is the way that researchers of the S-matrix theory attempt to derive the properties of particles and their interactions.

The fact that all the properties of particles are determined by principles closely related to the methods of observation would mean that the basic structures of the material world are determined, ultimately, by the way we look at this world; that the observed patterns of matter are reflections of patterns of mind. (Capra 1982, 93)

What quantum theory suggests is that reality is neither 'this' nor 'that'; it is not an already established reality of constants and fundamental entities, but a flow of energy where the behavior of one constituency cannot be interpreted except in relation to other constituencies. "Subatomic particles are not separate entities but interrelated energy patterns in an ongoing dynamic process" (94). According to Capra, these subatomic particles need to be conceived of as dynamic patterns that have a four dimensional quality in space-time. The patterns have a space aspect and a time aspect.
Their space aspect makes them appear as objects with a certain mass, their
time aspect as processes involving the equivalent energy. Thus the being of
matter and its activity cannot be separated; they are but different aspects of
the same space-time reality. (Capra, 91)

Capra explains that these patterns "can be given precise mathematical meaning but cannot
easily be expressed in words" (94). Thus, everything involves everything else.

Bohm's contribution to quantum theory is to extend this relational perspective to
include human consciousness as one relational aspect that needs to be included in research.
The majority of physicists, while they have proceeded beyond Newtonian physics, still
find Bohms' perspective too alien. However, the bootstrap theory of subatomic particles
has been successful in describing the strong interactions of subatomic phenomena and
Bohm's theory has emerged as one of two approaches that begin to include consciousness
in research (95). Bootstrap theory suggests that self-consistency is the key to understand-
ing the universe, rather than fundamental entities. Capra explains the essence of the
bootstrap theory:

The universe is seen as a dynamic web of interrelated events. None of the
properties of any parts of this web is fundamental; they all follow from the
properties of the other parts, and the overall consistency of their
interrelations determines the structure of the entire web. (Capra, 93)

A worldview that is not based upon fundamental entities, in Capra's opinion, makes the
bootstrap theory "one of the most profound systems of Western thought, raising it to the
level of Buddhist or Taoist philosophy." (Capra, 93).

Modern application of the the bootstrap theory is found outside the realm of physics
and is sometimes described as overlapping into Taoism or mysticism. For example, Mind-
ell believes that all process-oriented psychologies reflect an ancient Taoist-like
appreciation of the flow of life. The only fundamental constant we can attribute to psychology, Mindell says, is awareness. "As the physicists discovered, without the observer, there would be no physics. Everything that happens, happens in conjunction with the possibility that someone has become aware of it and observed it" (Mindell 1992, 71). For example, previous psychological theories in which there were references to such constants (fundamental entities) such as "ego", "self" or "unconscious" need to be transformed as part of the paradigm shift, since now the thrust is in "apprehending and working with change." Thus, we shift from an orientation of ego development, and replace "discrete elements" with growth in awareness.

It is an exaggeration to refer to shifting paradigms as if we mean to leave one and take up another. The bootstrap theory helps us realize that all theories are an approximation of reality and are capable of shedding light upon certain aspects of our reality. Each is limited in its own way. Therefore, it now becomes important to understand how certain theories are self-limiting and we must not assume that any one perspective or orientation is the only possible one. Modern science is not suggesting that traditional Newtonian physics is wrong and that quantum theory is correct; instead, "each theory is valid for a certain range of phenomena. Beyond this range it no longer gives a satisfactory description of nature, and new theories have to be found to replace the old one, or rather, to extend it by improving the approximation" (Capra 1982, 101).
Field Theory.

Although we know a great deal about the way fields affect the world as we perceive it, the truth is no one really knows what a field is. The closest we can come to describing what they are is to say that they are spatial structures in the fabric of space itself.

Michael Talbot, as quoted in Leadership and the New Science

In experiments which attempted to define the cause of change in a particle's energy pattern, changes or reaction of a physical nature were not found to be "locally controlled," a term that means that the variables required in our ability to predict an outcome are found within the structure of the particle itself. In quantum theory, "hidden" variables seem to be in operation and controlled "non-locally," which means that variables instantly connect to the universe as a whole and the connections cannot be predicted in a mathematical way.

This is the essence of quantum reality, explains Capra (1982). Particles are part of a larger continuous field that exists everywhere, hence the concept of a "quantum field," or fields of energy.

In the ordinary, macroscopic world nonlocal connections are relatively unimportant, and thus we can speak of separate objects and formulate the laws of physics in terms of certainties. But as we go to smaller dimensions, the influence of nonlocal connections becomes stronger; here the laws of physics can be formulated only in terms of probabilities, and it becomes more and more difficult to separate any part of the universe from the whole. (Capra 1982, 82)

A "field" can be described as a natural phenomena of dynamic energy flowing in space. Space, therefore, is not empty, as our eyes tell us it is, but, rather, filled with invis-
ible fields. Different theories define fields in different ways, but in each, fields are non-material, non-structural and become known to us through their effects.

The gravitational field is conceived as a curved structure in space-time; electromagnetic fields create disturbances that manifest themselves as electromagnetic radiations; quantum fields, perhaps a different field for each particle, produce particles when two fields intersect. (Wheatley 1994, 49)

As Margaret Wheatley explains, shifting vision from "small, discrete visible structures to an invisible world filled with mediums of connections" (49) has become an essential shift in focus for understanding the world anew. Understanding the meaning of this shift is explained by Wheatley in her book *Leadership and the New Science*:

Frank Wilczek and Betsy Devine, he a physicist, she an engineer turned writer, created an effective image for thinking about these invisible fields that exert visible influence. If we were to observe fish, unaware of the medium of water in which they swim, we would probably look for explanations of their movements in terms of one fish influencing another. If one fish swam by, and we observed the second fish swerving a little, we might think that the first was exerting a force on the second. But if we observed all the fish deflecting in a regular pattern, we might begin to suspect that some other medium was influencing their movements. We could test for this medium, even if it were still invisible to us, by creating disturbances in it and noticing the reactions of the fish. The space that is everywhere, from atoms to the sky, is more like this ocean, filled with fields that exert influence and bring matter into form. (Wheatley, 49-50)

Bohrn and others have applied the concept of field theory to social as well as physical realities. According to Mindell, our understanding of social fields develops from their effect on us; they are "manifest in physical structures, human feelings, a particular atmosphere, and specific jobs and roles" (14). Mindell further distinguishes a congruent field from other fields as one where what people say and do is the same as what they believe. Congruence is not a typical case in most fields and he sees the confusion and conflict within most groups and individuals as reflecting such lack of congruence.
Field theory has become a seminal line of thinking in areas of psychology and organizational development. Margaret Wheatley describes fields in organizations as powerful organizers in a quantum world view.

Organizational space can be filled with the invisible geometry of fields. Fields, being everywhere at once, can connect discrete and distant actions. Fields, because they can influence behavior, can cohere and organize separate events. (Wheatley, 5)

Thus, recent focus on culture, vision and values is one means by which we use ideas to actively manage our activities instead of people. The crucial element in organizations is recognizing the need for everyone to bring their own voice into such fields.

We need all of us out there, stating, clarifying, discussing, modeling, filling all of space with the messages we care about. If we do that, fields develop—and with them, their wondrous capacity to bring energy into form. (Wheatley, 56)

The Dialogue process can be seen as an attempt to create an awareness and a manifestation of these quanta or energy fields. By merely stating what is happening, like an announcement, awareness of field possibilities become observable at both the individual and group level. De Mare warns us, however, that this type of dialogue must be learned anew like a new language. Frustrated attempts at dialogical communication can become transformed through exposure to the new language of dialogue. He theorizes that in engaging with the tension of reaching for something different "Dialogue" releases "mental energy." "Through dialogue this newly released energy becomes the driving force of thought" (de Mare 1991, 26). Thus, Dialogue can be described primarily as a way of exploring the ongoing field of thought.
Dialogue as a Process for Change in the Post-Modern Era

The Nature of the Word Dialogue.

We are proposing a kind of collective inquiry not only into the content of what each of us says, thinks and feels, but also into the underlying motivations, assumptions and beliefs that lead us to do so.

David Bohm, in Dialogue: A Proposal

In his development of Dialogue David Bohm drew on his own background in theoretical physics and his close relationships with J. Krishnamurti, Albert Einstein and Patrick de Mare. Their profound influence on his life shaped his "insight that a wrong functioning of thought is behind most of the troubles of the human race" (Bohm and Edwards 1991, VII). In 1984, after a weekend seminar of lectures and discussion, Bohm documented in a book entitled, Unfolding Meaning, "the awakening of the process of dialogue itself as a free flow of meaning among all the participants" (Bohm 1990, Preface). Bohm's hope is that this new kind of communication, the Dialogue process, will slow the destruction and incoherence that is pervasive in the world through a new way of listening and speaking and thinking that is both collaborative and inclusive for all members in any designated group.

Dialogue is a label given to a communication modality that fosters open, honest and generative conversations in groups with a spirit of compassion and respect. In this style of communication learning emerges as a group process that is nurtured by individual awareness and sensitivity to the limits of personal and collective learned thought processes.
In the Dialogue process individuals become aware of how thought works and how insight is created, and therefore, develop the capacities for exploration through reflection and inquiry. The Dialogue process creates collective learning through exploring thought.

Bohm explains that the origin of the word ‘dialogue’ is the Greek word, *dialogos*. ‘Logos’ means ‘the word’ or the meaning of the word and ‘dia’ means ‘through’. "The picture or image that this derivation suggests is of a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us” (Bohm 1992, 1). The possibility for a flow of meaning to exist between individuals or within whole groups suggests a sense of collaboration through an increased sense of potential and creativity in a group. Bohm considers this flow of meaning to be the ‘glue’ or ‘cement’ that holds people together. Thus, through ‘dialogue’ we can develop ‘shared meaning’ and create cohesiveness (Mindell’s congruent field) in our societies.

The definition of ‘dialogue’ can also be distinguished from what it is not. Bohm contrasts ‘dialogue’ with ‘discussion’, with the same root as ‘percussion’ and ‘concussion’ which means breaking things up. With ‘discussion’ the idea is to analyze by breaking down into parts so that the different points of view can be brought out, measured and evaluated. Bohm believes that discussions limit access to other communication processes since in discussion usually we do not get beyond the different points of view which get batted back and forth like a ping-pong game. Generally discussion produces an adversarial, win-lose atmosphere, with people agreeing or disagreeing with views that they have heard. The ultimate objective is to win. Likewise, the use of ‘conviction’ or ‘persuasion’ common to discussion are not found in the Dialogue process, since, as Bohm notes, to
convince is to win by strong talk and to persuade by sweet talk (Bohm 1990, 15).

Instead of competition with one view winning, in dialogue everyone wins. Not only is the process participatory and inclusive, but the entire group plays at the game. The Dialogue process is not combative but highly cooperative, offering an alternative form of communication that respects all points of view and seeking to move beyond any one perspective into a richer understanding of the whole. This is accomplished through the development of a group’s increased capacity for awareness and attention.

The Breakdown in Communication.

Almost the first thing you are taught in school is that the world is divided into nations. It’s presented to the child as if it were a law of nature. As you grow up you see how costly these national boundaries are.

David Bohm and Mark Edwards in Changing Consciousness

In the eyes of many, societies have become increasingly dysfunctional. Bohm sees the breakdown within our societies as ultimately a breakdown in communication. In our own society, no one need look far to observe the disintegration of the family unit, the mistrust of political leaders, growing violence, poverty, and homelessness on our national landscape. The result is a making of the political, economical and environmental picture that is nationally and internationally bleak. The dismantling of the Berlin wall, perestroika and glasnost, at first meant rising hopes, until ethnic wars then erupted sending the larger
world into disbelief and confusion. Everywhere societies are breaking down; violence between peoples appears endemic, along with worldwide environmental destruction of rainforests and habitats and many animal and plant species important to our ecology.

Bohm depicts our violence as the result of conflict that has come ultimately from our thought (1991). The breakdown in communication that Bohm is referring to can be seen in all the interactions between individuals, in one on one relationships as well as small and large groups. According to Bohm, people are affected by their societies, even though they may not feel a part of them in a subjective sense. However, all human relations today suffer from a common pattern of not directly facing anything. "They talk around things, avoiding the difficulties" (Bohm 1990, 11). This was probably not the case in older, non-industrialized societies. An anthropologist who lived among a North American, hunter-gatherer tribe witnessed the occasional gathering together of 20-40 people for the purpose of just talking. After much talking, having made no decisions, they disbanded.

The meeting went on, until it finally seemed to stop for no reason at all and the group dispersed. Yet after that, everyone seemed to know what to do, because they understood each other so well. Then they could get together in smaller groups and do something or decide things. (Bohm 1990, 11)

Modern societies have a different set of expectations and experiences. First, it seems that people find communication difficult even one on one. Second, in groups people expect a "set purpose" (1990, 2) and they want a leader. Without leaders people do not know how to talk together, explains Bohm, and they become very uncomfortable. Third, people cannot get beyond expressing their own self-interest and viewpoint, their own assumptions and opinions (Bohm 1990).

The difficulties of communicating even one on one in the modern world reflect a
loss of interpersonal connection. The inability to go beyond personal assumptions and differences is shared by Bohm in the following true story about Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr, two leading physicists at the turn of the century.

Einstein remembered that when he first met Bohr, he felt close to him. He wrote of a feeling of love for him. They talked physics in a very animated way, and so on. But they finally came upon a point where they had two different assumptions, or opinions, about what was the way to truth. Bohr’s judgements were based on his view of quantum theory, and Einstein’s on his view of relativity. They talked it over again and again in a very patient way, with all goodwill. This went on for years, and neither of them yielded. Each one just repeated what he had been saying before. So finally they found that they weren’t getting anywhere, and they gradually drifted apart. They didn’t see each other for a long time after that.

Then one year, both of them were at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, but they still didn’t meet each other. A mathematician named Herman Weyl said, “It would be nice if they got together. It’s a pity that they don’t.” So he arranged a party to which Einstein and Bohr and their respective students were invited. Einstein and his associates stayed at one end of the room, and Bohr and his associates stayed at the other end. They couldn’t get together because they had nothing to talk about. They couldn’t share any meaning, because each one felt his meaning was true. How can you share if you are sure you have truth and the other fellow is sure he has truth, and the truths don’t agree? (Bohm 1990, 25-26)

Communication breaks down when we can’t get past our strongly held opinions which are held so tightly we act like they are ‘Truth’. Strongly held opinions are problematic both for individuals, and politically they ferment our global issues. Bohm argues that our deeply held assumptions reflect deeply held, largely unconscious beliefs that we rise to protect when our self-interest appears threatened. Actions that emerge from this breakdown in communication reflect our increasingly incoherent culture, what Bohm defines as our lack of shared meaning in society. Bohm proposes a different approach to current day challenges; he seeks to direct our attention beyond problem solving and into
the heart of matter, the structure of thought itself. He asks us to begin to consider how our thought has create and re-creates the fragmentation so prevalent around us.

The Structure of Thought.

Can thought solve this problem, which thought has created?
Krishnamurti
(from a talk in Switzerland in 1978)

According to Bohm, the root of the current crises facing the world today is found in the overall process of thought itself (1981). We cannot expect existing knowledge to meet our challenges because the type of thinking underlying such knowledge is limited by our previously held assumptions. Instead, by learning how thought works we meet today's challenge with a new consciousness and thus open ourselves to new thinking and new creative possibilities (Bohm 1981, 4). Bohm argues that because we cannot expect to find a complete solution by looking at the actual process of thought, our emphasis should be on exploration and inquiry which is the all important means leading to insight. Bohm sees "insight" as an entirely different type of "quantum" thinking that leaps past the limitations of current assumptions. Bohm asserts that insight is that "which is required to bring knowledge to order" (Bohm 1981, 4).

Because the intrinsic nature of past thought divides things up, we look at things in
isolation. Being able to discriminate between things, however, has its advantages, such as our ability to distinguish a chair from a table. We can pick up either table or chair and move it without it effecting the other. We can consider them separate and isolated. But discrimination can go too far. For instance, we cannot move the back of the chair separately from the leg of the same chair even though we can distinguish the back from the leg (Bohm and Edwards 1991, 4).

Bohm concludes, "people tend to think that the distinction between nations is like the distinction between the chair and the table, but they are not" (4). Nations are not independent objects like a table and chair even though the way they are used in language contains this implicit suggestion.

Bohm believes that thought and knowledge are both limited and limiting, although our common assumption is to think that thought is not limited. We tend to think that thought is something that we can use easily; we call it up in service of our needs and it responds appropriately in the context of our desire. Because we believe that our sensory perception is a separate phenomena from the process of our thought, we then conclude that thought "is just telling us the way things are and not doing anything" (4).

On the contrary, according to Bohm, thought and knowledge are not our servants, not passive props to be called forth at will. Thought and knowledge are active participants intertwining with our sensory perception, thus affecting everything we perceive (think we perceive) and do, the way we behave, the way we respond, and all our emotional responses. "We are saying that thought is not merely the intellectual activity; rather it is one connected process which includes feeling, the body and so on. Every reaction to thought is
simultaneously emotional, neurophysiological, chemical and everything else” (1981, 4-5).

The reason thought and knowledge are different from our perception of them is because they are both memory-based. Bohm identifies three types of memory-based knowledge. There is abstract knowledge of things stored in memory, in books, in computers. There is also tacit knowledge which is knowledge without words, as the knowledge developed in motor memory as happens when learning to ride a bicycle. Successfully achieving the necessary skills of riding a bicycle means that we have a knowledge that has application. Our beliefs are another part of knowledge which is memory-based. Beliefs are based on presuppositions and are our strong, hidden motivators. They are the underpinnings of life; we cannot live without them; they effect everything we say, think, feel and do, yet they remain largely as unconscious as they are pervasive. For example, a prejudice is a presupposition.

Thought and perception are linked by a thick bundle of nerves, making fast connections between them. As the senses supply facts and information our thoughts provide meaning. Experiences build meaning over time so that eventually our responses come to be called up automatically. Thought, therefore, becomes reactive because it is based in memory, and thus acts like a conditioned reflex. Thought, therefore, like information stored on a computer disk is stored in memory. Sensory perception is not free from thought and thought is not fresh because it has largely been conditioned by past experiences.

A thought is actually a past event, but we forget that it is operating from memory, and therefore thought acts as an active participant in our present moment of mental inner
processing. Learning to be aware of how thought is affecting our thinking brings us to begin to understand the limits of knowledge and thus, the "proper" application of knowledge (Bohm 1981, 5).

Based on past experience, thought helps create impressions of what is "out there." It selects, abstracts and attracts our attention. But there is more "beyond what thought can grasp" (Bohm and Edwards 1991, 33). Like a map, thought is an abstraction, our general map of reality. But it is not REALITY. Like a map, it may be the wrong structure in one instance and a reasonable representation in another. Like a map, thought is incomplete. Thought, being neither good nor bad, is limited in its capacity to represent wholeness.

Thought's analytical tenacity to separate things into compartments, causes us to think in terms of these divisions. They become the reality. Thinking in this manner creates fragmentation and knowledge of parts, instead of knowledge of the greater whole. "Fragmentation" as defined by Bohm means to break things up arbitrarily (Bohm and Edwards, 6). Things that are fragmented have false divisions; wholeness is not easily detected. In the parts of a watch, for example, we see a whole watch.

However, if you smashed the watch, you would get fragments, parts just arbitrary broken up. People tend to think of nations as parts, but they are really fragments... So it is this fragmentation, this fictional way of thinking, that has created all this trouble and produced the armies and the nuclear bombs and the refugees with all their suffering and also our inability to solve the ecological problems, and economic problems, and so on. (6)

Thought is creative; it has given us results, tangible evidence of which we remain largely unaware. Divisions and categories have brought factories, books, fields, and nations into actuality. Thought creates but we forget its active nature. The tangible evidence of thought does not intuitively appear to be connected with thought, nor do we
ordinarily look at our sensory perception and thought as intuitively connected, as he explains:

The point is, that memory is something you never see and in many ways has been interchanged with perception. The movement of the mind is far too subtle, complex and rapidly moving to be grasped by thought. So we are caught, responding from memory without knowing that this is actually happening. Our perceptions are shaped and colored by memory in ways that are not conscious (Bohm 1981, 5).

To the extent that we are unaware of the limits of thought and knowledge and the unconscious, memory-based thought from which our actions emerge, we are entrapped in a process where thought creates the world and says it didn’t do it and it says it cannot stop. Thought has thus lead us into our present reality of damaging actions and conflict.

According to Bohm, at best, thought can only be a guide. It cannot be self-regulating because it is limited in its completeness. It can not be a risk taker because it is programmed to look for security. Thought and emotion are in collusion with comfort. One feature of thought is that we can get caught up with thought and feeling and reach conclusions that are safe: It is easier to believe that “whatever everybody agrees on must be true” (Bohm and Edwards, 32). We are limited in our ability to keep track of what is independently real and what is produced by thought because thought can’t keep track of what is projected from memory and what is direct perception and experience. In order for our actions to emerge from more complete and coherent thought we must constantly be aware of the limits inherent in thought.

The significance of what Bohm is saying is subtle. He is stating that there is something about thought that is inherent in its structure and this something we cannot change, like we can change a disposition. He is saying that thought itself becomes its own barrier
to gaining insight into wholeness of life. The barrier lets in pieces of knowledge but cannot allow complete knowledge. In order to understand the whole, we must go beyond thought that is memory-based and question that which is held to be absolutely necessary. Krishnamurti poignantly reminds us: “To live with thought [and by that he means the response of memory] is like living in a room with a poisonous snake” (in Bohm and Edwards, 135). The essence of Bohm’s message to us is clearly a solution to this problem inherent in thought. "That is, to question ceaselessly, without an aggressive wish to demolish things, but just simply to see clearly" (Bohm 1981, 8). This process requires a passion and energy to pursue continuous and deep inquiry into contradiction and paradox, not in an analytical way, but in an insightful way.


The spirit of a Dialogue is one of free play, a sort of collective dance of the mind that, nevertheless has immense power and reveals coherent purpose. Once begun it becomes a continuing adventure that can open the way to significant and creative change.

David Bohm, in Dialogue: A Proposal

Reflecting on thoughts as they occur.

Clearly perception through the senses with its instantaneous connection to memory-based thought will not create reflection, because thought does not keep track of its own activity. It is extremely difficult for us to separate our thoughts. Perception is merely
data, a smell, an image, a sound, without an accompanying interpretation. When data is frequently perceived, it becomes linked with thought through what is usually termed conditioned reflex. The identifying smell of brownies baking in the oven is a conditioned perception-thought process for those who have linked and stored this smell in memory, but the smell of something new will remain a perception without associated, automatic, programmed thought.

Reflective thinking is an attempt to fill the need to keep track of what thought is doing. Reflection uses a different kind of perception, which Bohm describes as a perception “through” the mind. This kind of perception uses non-physical data; such data is gathered by becoming aware and noticing our thought processes, and further, also noticing incoherent thought and fragmentation. We do this by detecting gaps in congruency between what we say, how we feel, what we think, and our deeply held assumptions or opinions. Through this process Bohm believes we travel a little beyond the mind; through reflection, thought stops. We are looking through the mind (Bohm and Edwards, 19). Such perception is capable of reflecting on subtle memory-based thought processes that serve to involuntarily commit us to repetitious thought patterns. When incoherence is discovered and faulty thought patterns exposed, subsequent thought can then be freed from the automatic mindlessness created by habitual thought patterns. Increasing our capacity to think reflectively as to what the mind is doing, to build attention and awareness in looking at the mind at work, creates a pathway for a disciplined application of acquired knowledge as well as further learning opportunities.
Generative learning through participation.

The intent of a dialogue process differs from problem solving. Yet, paradoxically, Bohm sees the Dialogue process as addressing the "problem" at the heart of the present fragmentation and incoherence of our learned thought patterns. Suspension of previous patterns and self-reflection allow difficulties to be seen in a different light; fresh perspectives and interpretations then emerge. The creative nature of a Dialogue process pushes the horizons of collective exploration out beyond any one individual perspective, and constantly re-defines "problems" in a broader, more holistic context.

Indeed, creativity in the Dialogue process emerges from a sense of personal and collective freedom to explore and learn together. The process itself fosters an environment of safety and openness which encourages a spontaneous flow of ideas in a group. The process fosters a new willingness for individuals to tolerate tension between various perspectives so that they can participate openly in the process. (According to Bohm, "participate" means both 'to partake of' and 'to take part in'.) Participation means that the group would be "taking part and communicating and creating a common meaning" (Bohm 1990, 15), although it is clear that such meaning is not meant to exclude or overshadow individual meanings. Individual opinions do not necessarily change in this generative process; rather, individual opinions become absorbed into the group. When people hold on to their opinions very strongly in an identified way (defensive routines), barriers erupt that interfere with creativity and generative group outcome. Individuals who identify so strongly with one point of view that they defend rather than share their assumptions, push away whatever is new (15). Defending a point of view or belief necessarily prevents
cooperative movement forward into common understanding.

Dialogue can also be viewed as a discipline in which we purposely create generative conversations (Dhority 1995, 1). According to Alan Webber, former editor of the Harvard Business Review, people often develop what they know through conversation and so, "the most important work in the new economy is creating conversations". Therefore, participants in a Dialogue process help bring about this field of generativeness, whether they are speaking or listening.

The application of generative approaches are, of course, not new. For instance, Chris Argyris of Harvard University believes that opening up the process of learning in organizations must focus on the root causes of "organizational defenses." He suggests that people who learn to understand their part in these root causes can do so because they are less defensive and open to being changed. He describes two kinds of defensiveness. In one type, individuals defend their views with vigor, but remain open, while, in the second type they remain closed: "The key criterion for learning is how open individuals are to examining their personal responsibility, to playing with ideas that seem wrong, and to dealing with their bewilderment and frustration while they are learning" (Argyris 1990, 154). Forceful expression of one's view does not have to be interpreted to mean an entrenchment to that view. Robert Kegan argues that assertively defending one's view may be a matter of style in which a person comes to a more inclusive understanding of all views. Using a style of self-advocacy differs from a closed defensiveness. "The self-authorizing capacity to 'decide for myself' does not also have to implicate the stylistic preference to 'decide by myself'. I can be self-authorizing in a relational way" (Kegan 1994, 219). However, in my
view, self-advocacy seldom contributes to the generative ability of a group, unless it is done in such a ways as to honor the sense of safety others want, as well as honoring the collective nature of group collaboration.

**Generating a field for insight.**

Insight may be defined as a momentary flash of understanding, a sudden perception that is not preceded by mental effort. Insight just comes, but not by direction or will, or use of analysis or knowledge.

Seeing the truth of it is to have insight. That insight is not memory, is not idea, is not something out of the past. You see directly the truth of it and from that there is action, which is complete. (Krishnamurti in "Touch the Future")

For Bohm, insight is crucial, significant to everything we do in our world: insight is seen as a universal opportunity not restricted to scientific or creative endeavors; "insight dissolves the mind’s attachment to all kinds of absurdities that hold us prisoner to the past" (Bohm 1981, 8).

Bohm specifically points to the need to value insight in education. Every individual should be encouraged to learn how to question with energy and passion that which is not clear. If we extend value into questioning our whole way of being, our thinking, feeling and acting then such energy opens the mind to new directions. Bohm sees little attention being given to insight in our present society today, instead, we emphasis accumulating knowledge that will be useful and true questioning is discouraged since it tends to disturb our deeply held beliefs.

Bohm argues that without insight neither imagination nor reason cannot actually
be creative, and thus, we need to place the highest value on insight: "Then we'll have a
different attitude to knowledge, values and education. The whole of life will be a field in
which there is no end to the possibility of fresh and original perceptions" (Bohm 1981, 8).

The capacity for insight means to open ourselves up to all the facts, any of the facts
of the territory, especially when challenges arise that do not fit existing frameworks (Bohm
1981, 5). However, to enter the realm where insight becomes possible requires great
passion and energy of mind, because it requires us to go past the certainties we associate
with our presuppositions. Deep, unconscious beliefs are held to be "necessary," a Latin
word meaning "not yielding." When a belief is necessary it does not change easily, does
not "give way." Bohm explains that when a predisposition is held with absolute necessity
it is given absolute priority and cannot, by definition, yield to anything. The problem,
however, is that knowledge must embrace fresh perceptions. When knowledge is not open
to fresh perceptions it selects against them, distorts them, or twists them to fit the existing
framework or theory. It is clear that this pre-determined and closed-minded feature of
knowledge triggers self-deception and incoherence. "This trap is very subtle because the
unconscious presupposition of absolute necessity operates before one can think reflectively"
(Bohm 1981, 7). Past thinking thus limits our capacity for insight, because thought and
knowledge are self-centered and cannot see what they are doing. Our habits of clinging to
"necessary" and non-yielding beliefs, lead thought to contradictions, distortions and
rationalizations. Bohm uses national sovereignty as an example of how such a world-wide
culturally held priority puts its interests first, at the expense of anything else.

This leads to unending chaos and conflict, especially in the modern world
in which everyone clearly depends on everyone. To maintain the idea of
absolute sovereignty against the fact of mutual interdependence requires
great distortion and self-deception. (Bohm 1981, 7)

The same process of self-interest holds for individuals. The ability to stay open and
curious (Bohm refers to this as passion) can lead us to new insights and, thus, for Bohm,
into new knowledge.

**Holding group tensions and moving into shared meaning.**

The collective dimension of the human being, where we have a consider­
able number of people, has a qualitatively new feature: it has power ---
potentially, or even actually. And in dialogue we discuss how to bring that
to some sort of coherence and order. The question is really: do you see the
necessity of this process? That's the key question. If you see that it is
absolutely necessary, then you have to do something. (Bohm 1990, 40)

Dialogue is serious work. Engagement in a Dialogue process may not always be smooth
and comfortable, but, as Bohm explains, if we see the necessity of developing a coherent
society then the action that we choose to take is clearly one of working toward building
shared meaning through dialogue. In seeing the necessity of this, we must take it seriously
or we will back out and succumb to defending our opinions and adding to present
incoherence.

The relationships and connections between individuals and institutions defines a
society, but in order to have a culture, one must also have shared meaning, that is, a
common sense of purpose, values and significance. The group mind is the culture.
According to de Mare, the thinking agency of the individual is "mind" and the large group
equivalent is "culture" (de Mare 1991, 26).

According to Bohm, the object of a dialogue is to build shared meaning in a group.
Each individual takes in the diverse opinions, suspends judgement on them, looks at them
and senses what it all means. Shared meaning is what develops in the group mind when the individuals of that group succeed in suspending their assumptions, so that they "neither carry them out nor suppress them." When assumptions are suspended from judgement they are still open for exploration. Over time exploration into these assumptions opens into a breadth of collective understanding that goes beyond any one individual. In a dialogue there is a sense of movement between the individual and the collective, and at the same time, the whole moves away from the fragmentation toward coherence.

As individuals open themselves, they gain the necessary ability to bring their awareness to the forefront without judgement. Participants can then develop a feeling of what ancient Greeks knew as "koinonia," which means an "impersonal fellowship," a type of group communion which unfolds when a group begins to come upon new insights, together (DeMare 1991). Bohm believes that "this sharing of the mind, of consciousness, is more important than the content of the opinions" (Bohm 1990, 22).
CHAPTER IV
CONCEPTS OF DIALOGUE BEYOND DAVID BOHM

Introduction

Today, several contributors are advancing conceptual theory and practice beyond the initial conceptualization of David Bohm. In this section we will explore these contributions. First, I will examine the specific theoretical contributions of William Isaacs, director of The Dialogue Project, a research endeavor associated with the Organizational Learning Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As project director, Isaacs currently serves as one of the main theoreticians in the conceptualization of Dialogue.

Second, I will briefly review contributions from some Dialogue practitioners offering meaningful theoretical contributions through reflection on facilitation and group process: Juanita Brown and Sherrin Bennett in the field of "strategic dialogue"; Peter Senge and Fred Kofman’s work on dialogue in organizations; Lynn Dhority’s commentary on facilitating dialogue in educational settings; and, Sue Miller Hurst’s vision for education.

Other writings, while not speaking directly about Dialogue, also serve to inform our understanding of shifting paradigms. Such writings reflect society’s recent and evolving world view regarding the nature of our planetary interdependence. It is not within the scope of this project to review these works in depth; nevertheless, it is important to
comment upon the effect such work has on our capacity for understanding the nature of Dialogue. These significant contributions have met with popular appeal and a large, broad-based readership. The scientific basis of such authors combine with general public readiness to serve to reinforce the philosophical underpinnings of Dialogue. These writers provide further legitimation for our current need to understand and to begin serious practice of Dialogue. Fritjof Capra, author of *The Turning Point*, and Danah Zohar, author of *The Quantum Society*, both describe the mechanistic-Newtonian, reductionist model as the philosophical source of our present societal limitations and issues, as well as the emerging "post-modern" systems-style, organic and relational model of perception. Also contributing to expanding horizons, medical perspectives, from physicians such as Jon Kabat-Zinn, Director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and Dean Ornish, director of the Preventative Medical Research Institute in Sausalito, call the public into a holistic integration of emotional, spiritual and physical realities. The Dialogue process co-operates implicitly with such broadened mental models.

**The Dialogue Project**

In the Dialogue Project theory building is central to the research team, according to William Isaacs. Through three years of Dialogue implementation in practical settings and the subsequent analysis, the team has refined the meaning of "learned thought patterns" (Isaacs 1995) offering further insight into the nature and practice of Dialogue.

They have defined "critical variables defining fragmentation," specific strategies held (hidden) in thought and which appear in face-to-face interactions. They are

Objectification: This is the tendency for thought to take a concept, an abstraction, and expand the interpretation into a materialization of the concept. For instance, the concept of the "superego", Isaacs suggests, has now become a "thing," in that "people take for granted that there really is a superego," thus, we have seemingly lost the notion that the superego is simply a category that has been created and developed.

Independence: Thought is unaware of its own process. Receiving the stimuli of an external object and the processing of the meaning of that stimuli are so interwoven that we perceive them as one and the same. For example, a teacher who has a student that doesn't complete homework might conclude without hesitation that this student is lazy and purposely ignoring school responsibilities. In the recent tragic Oklahoma bombing, many people impulsively concluded that those responsible for the act were Moslem extremists. The lack of separation between sensory perception and interpretation leads to the conclusion that thought occurs outside the realm of our input, thus independent from our participation in the process. Isaacs explains that "independence is fragmentation at the level of mental 'proprioception', or the inability of thought to connect its movement to consequences" (1995, 7).

It is for this reason, Isaacs further argues, that inquiry becomes valuable. Inquiry holds the potential for distinguishing and dislodging perception from interpretation and thus clarifying the memory connection between the two.

Literalness: Whereas independence is the notion that thought does not participate
as a separate entity from perception, literalness is the notion that our experience is reality. The tendency of literalness is to allow the assumption that our individual windows to the world let us clearly see 'how it is' out there, despite the findings of others to the contrary. Bill states that the concept of a continuously created external world is "widely acknowledged as a construction of the neurophysiological and cognitive structures of the human being" (7). The world we live in, therefore, has been and is constructed in thought.

**Rigidity:** There is fragmentation in thought because our responses to our world are memory based; we do not respond "fresh" to each moment. We tend to blur the distinction, or even acknowledge that there is a distinction, between response from memory and response with attention to the moment. Interpretations that people give their experiences are often rigidly held and quickly, automatically displayed because they are based in memory. The habitual nature of such interpretations limit the range of thinking; thus, spontaneity in face-to-face interactions is limited. When we respond to a situation from thought that has been conditioned by our past experiences, not only are our responses predictable, but the sense of certainty surrounding them protects them from examination as well; thus, such responses are less likely to become observed. Our conditioning defends our learned thought processes and other mental routines and categories. This is necessarily so, as the "bandwidth of response to a situation managed from our memory must be limited to our prior responses" (7). Our initial response to situations comes from memory and is highly conditioned, and, thus, is not capable of more mindfulness.

**Violence:** Our tendency to alter that with which we do not concur is a form of fragmentation that Isaacs refers to as 'violence', an undue use of force in thought in order
to avoid looking at the process of thought. It is the habit of thought to 'fix', undo, or alter things that are not to our liking or expectation. Suspending thought is such a difficult possibility that, we continue in grooves of unexamined mental processes that continually attempt to change our incoming perception so that our perceptions line-up with the memory-based responses from thought. For Isaacs, the above outlined various "tacit dimensions in thought" are the source of our current fragmentation.

Isaacs further explores Bohm's analogic use of "hot" and "cool" inquiry, polarization and "immunity to changes in self-image." Expanding the analogy that Bohm drew between superconductivity and dialogue, Isaacs compares "cool" inquiry to supercooled electrons which flow around objects, acting like a coherent whole and producing speed and efficiency. "Normal" electrons crash into each other, loose energy and create heat, and thus are analogous to face-to-face interactions like discussion (its Latin root which means 'breaking apart'). "Hot" inquiry causes breaking apart; breaking down into parts can also be seen as akin to the process of analysis.

"Cool" inquiry requires a shift in attention to the whole by looking or asking "into the way the whole organizes the parts" (Isaacs 1995, 8). The focus of attention is not the individual aspects of the content, but "field dynamics" that are created by different patterns of face-to-face interactions. For instance, studying actual field dynamics would involve becoming aware of the "nature of different face-to-face moves and their impact on the overall climate, level of safety among the people concerned, their depth of listening, and quality of attention"(8).

In self-reflection, where the listener thinks over the physical/emotional impact of
a previous interaction "cool" inquiry is actively pursued. Modeling this level of mindfulness encourages this form of inquiry in others, says Isaacs.

He describes "polarization" as a phenomena experienced as result of the tacit dimensions of thought explained above. With polarization there is minimal capacity to inquire into the heart of a conflict. "To the extent that thought creates independent, objectified pictures that are of necessity partial reflections of the world, holds them as literal, and then finds them at odds with other pictures, polarization is sure to arise" (9). In that thought holds itself to be "necessary," it will rise to defend its positions against any threat.

Another common phenomena, is "immunity to changes in self-image" (9). Isaacs defines this as our lack of willingness, or "systematic resistance," to reflect on our own biases, point of view, or lens that we automatically bring to a situation. His hypothesis is that these lenses serve to self-define. Due to the fragmented habit of thought that identifies the personal self with a personal opinion, our own biases are usually not available to our skeptical thinking as this would cause a sense of threat to self. He suggests that the integration of "forces of thought" and "face-to-face interactions" create an unstable atmosphere or "field" in terms of social dynamics. This then leads to "organizational defensive routines" that serve to perpetuate the ongoing patterns of thinking and interacting.

For the Dialogue Project work, his premise is that "the ‘field’ is the most fundamental level which requires our attention" (9). The data collected through the Dialogue Project has thus led researchers to construct a model of the "field" domain as a
dynamic, flowing movement. The "field" itself is a combination of culturally held tacit assumptions and the flow of thought process within it. The "work" or purpose of Dialogue, then is intervention into this field.

Just as David Bohm's conceptualization of dialogue was influenced by the work of psychoanalysis, Isaacs has also been affected and directly influenced by David Kantor, a family systems therapist. The focus of MIT research in the practice of dialogue is increasing awareness of the movement in the "field", that is, to experience directly the products, the actions, the thinking that appear as direct results of our tacit thought and action patterns in collective settings (9). Awareness as to the dynamics within the "field" includes a focus on the following:

1) "the quality and nature of the collective attention and listening brought to bear on a subject",
2) "the tone and texture of the interactions",
3) "the pattern of the shared reasoning",
4) "the ways in which people tend to unwittingly reproduce and embody the content of their conversation within the process of the conversation" (9).

The pathway for developing awareness, according to Bohm, is through two types of attention: Reflection, an awareness focused on past experiences and based in memory on images and mental categories that have been programmed from past experiences; and Proprioception, a self-awareness, based in the moment. To gain a deeper level of understanding of the nature of attention as it relates to increased consciousness about the nature of thought Isaac's ideas are also helpful. Looking more specifically at the word proprioceptive, the Latin derivation does include "one's self" which we could understand to mean simply self-perception. However, the etiology of the word, proprioceptive, is also
a word used to mean “activated by, pertaining to, or designating stimuli produced within the organism by movement or tension in its own tissue.” Proprioception is a system of somatic tension that is picked up by proprioceptors, or internal receptors for stimuli, and converted into some action within the body. To apply this relational quality to thought suggests we are looking for increased awareness of the physical movement, sensation, tension within our bodies and to notice the thought being awakened in us. Developing this mind-body consciousness increases the capacity to understand the relational aspects between the dimensions of thought, the tacit assumptions that we hold and our more somatic levels of response.

The purpose of Dialogue work, according to Isaacs, is to “operationalize” (1995, 10) the field, make it practical and receptive for both reflective and proprioceptive attention, as well as the inquiry that then arises. To this end, Isaacs has introduced the concept of the environmental “container” for the Dialogue process, an atmosphere that feels safe (“lowers the transaction costs”) and enables people to explore through Dialogue the underlying assumptions of the group through inquiry.

Isaacs proposes a theoretical model for what his data suggests are the changes in the "field" over time. As the process progresses, the "container" moves through various stages: (I) Instability of the container; (II) Instability in the container; (III) Inquiry in the container; and finally, (IV) Creativity in the container, "where members begin to think generatively, and new understandings based on collective perception emerge" (12). Also, each phase corresponds to emotional levels that also evolve: grief, anger, fear and finally, over time, joy. Additionally, he suggests the data from the Dialogue Project demonstrates
a progression of "core elements" that evolve in the container over time. With each phase comes a gradual increase in a collective awareness of tacit knowledge, mental models (unconscious assumptions) and learned thought patterns that have served as limitations to individual and collective thinking and action. As the stability of the container increases, these "core elements" evolve toward a collective mindfulness, a greater capacity for connecting mind-body and a new awareness of "embodied wholeness". The worldview, (or perception of the group) makes a collective shift.

Patrick de Mare, a psychoanalyst, describes a similar journey of transformation from "hate" (a word similar to Isaacs’ meaning of violence, a form of fragmentation), through Dialogue, to Koinonia, or impersonal fellowship. His psychoanalytically based interpretation of group process is that energy and hate arise naturally from participation in large group experiences. Opposing forces of individual and social structures generate "ego energy (or hate) that provides the basis of thinking and dialogue" (de Mare 1991, 26). Dialogue goes beyond other dimensions of thinking in large groups, such as: 1) a person to person vertical dimension and 2) a lateral dimension, which takes into account the ideas of others and is similar to the lateral thinking described by deBono. "Out of dialogue emerges a third dimension, neither of reality nor of pleasure but of meaning..." (27).

Isaacs depicts a similar group journey in his model for the Evolution of Dialogue. With each level of container stability, there is a parallel movement forward: invitation, conversation, deliberation, suspension, dialogue, and metalogue. Initially, an invitation is extended for gathering, which precedes to a turning together (conversation), and a weighing out of the ideas (deliberation). This transpires while the group is adjusting to a
new and unstructured context, which places the group in an "initiatory crisis," which he refers to as "instability of the container." As participants wrestle with a structure of no leader, no agenda, no purpose and no decisions, opinions surface in a context of incoherence.

At this point there is a fork in the road, as individuals begin to realize that in order to stay together in conversation and move forward with their many points of view, each person will consider suspending (to hang in front) all opinions for further exploration. The other fork points toward discussion (to shake apart), which leads in the direction of a logical analysis (dialectic) and a beating down of others' ideas (debate). With the fluctuation in the group between discussion and suspension, there is "instability in the container" and is called "crisis of suspension."

At this point ("instability in the container") the group begins to search for new rules, but finds few rules that allow Dialogue to emerge. People begin to 'think about their thinking' at this stage ("going meta"), and to develop new language and new cognitive perceptions.

People also typically engage in what we call 'model clash', entertaining the question 'whose meaning has more power here?' Reflecting on these polarizations and the thinking that underlies them, the impacts they have, and the order between them are all key elements at this stage" (1995, 13). Experiencing this crisis, participants must become aware of what is happening and use inquiry to develop greater awareness with such questions as: "Where am I listening from? What can I learn if I slow things down and inquire?" (Isaacs 1993, 4)

When a critical mass engage in suspension instead of discussion, conversation moves to the next phase, "inquiry in the container." During this phase a flow of meaning (dialogue) develops and the use of "cool" inquiry increases in the group. The group begins
to move together, insight occurs, and energy becomes unlocked from habitual thought patterns. People begin to disidentify themselves from issues that they once used to automatically define themselves. They now stand aside from topics, making it easier for the group to talk about issues that were previously divisive. This phase holds pain for participants as they realize how their constrictive thought patterns have limited their thinking and action in their work and personal lives. This crisis of collective pain is a challenge that requires facing the self-created limits of experience with discipline and collective trust (Isaacs 1993, 4).

As people begin to share in a common pool of meaning through the practice of sufficiently exploring each others views, they experience a new way of thinking together that takes on a rhythm and pace of its own. “Creativity in the container” labels this phase, and according to the data from the Dialogue Project, there is some evidence that “a new kind of mind” can emerge among people (Isaacs 1995, 14). Differences of opinion will still exist, but people will see more readily the distinction between thinking based in memory and thinking based in the moment. People may find conversations difficult in this phase. Previously held categories, and rigidly held thoughts may no longer feel useful, according to Isaacs. New understandings challenge people to find new ways of expressing. A new experience of silence, different and meaningful, feels rich and comfortable. Isaacs offers a 13th century poem by Rumi to express the experience of silence:

Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing
There is a field
I will meet you there
When the soul lies down in that grass
The world is too full to talk about. (in Isaacs 1993,4)
When words do flow within this later container of creativity, words express a new integration of structure and content; and, the medium and message are linked, and spoken words then convey meaning that is coherent at the group level. Energy is released from previously held rigid thinking and is now free to permit "new levels of intelligence and creativity in the container" (Isaacs 1995, 4).

The process of Dialogue has become better defined through the work of Isaacs and the collaborators in the Dialogue Project, since some analysis is helpful in order for individuals to grasp conceptually that which in final experiential form is beyond analysis. In Western culture, there is great need, in my mind, to draw people into Dialogue across a bridge that is comfortable and familiar, where Dialogue theory is clearly displayed. Without this approach, people’s ‘learned thought processes’ can easily prematurely categorize dialogue, passing judgement before individuals have understood the value of suspending or the significance of Dialogue’s collective creativity and intelligence. It is also helpful to compare the Dialogue process to other group processes, so people can understand that the processes in Dialogue are distinctive. For instance, in Dialogue, people focus on the nature of the thought processes underlying what appears to be being discussed in the group. Attention is constantly given to developing awarenesses to individual and collective reasoning. In Dialogue people do not focus on giving feedback to each other or solving problems, but instead emphasize reflection and sharing one’s own projections and impulses. Along with listening to others, emphasis is also on listening to one’s self. Thus, honing our understanding of what Dialogue is and is not provides directions and guidelines for participants and for facilitators.
Theoretical contributions are helpful to our understanding of Dialogue; however, I am also aware of the need to balance the comfort that might be afforded by a map of guidelines like Isaacs offers with the necessary freedom in the Dialogue process that is required to stay open to the moment. Our growth in developing Dialogue, both as a theoretical model and as a practice, suggests that we use any map as a navigational tool. Yet, Dialogue is not about living from an ideal created out of an experience. There is still a tendency for people to create in their minds a certain way to be from whatever their experiences in Dialogue have been. Even though "Dialogue is iconoclastic...in its continuous invitation to people to live from present experience, not from memory" (Isaacs 1994, 13), Isaac’s research indicates that groups can flounder. The conceptual development of Dialogue could flounder as well, if we lock our categories about Dialogue into convenient storage units in memory that become further automatic conditioned responses. So, the challenge is to be aware of thought’s patterns, let them inform us, but not let them dictate how Dialogue "is."

Strategic Dialogue

While Isaacs’ interest centers on what happens in Dialogue, Juanita Brown and Sherrin Bennett contribute from their experiences of strategic dialogue in business organizations. Unique use of metaphor and visual imagery are distinctive elements of their approach. They have designed workshops that move groups from their tacit ways of knowing to explicit ways of knowing. They utilize dialogue elements to pursue their fundamental goal, a spirit of inquiry, “of discovery, questioning and exploration ---even of mystery and adventure” (Brown and Bennett 1994, 5). Collaborative inquiry leads to
"breakthrough insight," generative learning and systemic understanding of the whole; and this keeps the organization responsive to both its present conditions and successful planning of its future.

The purpose of developing a dialogue approach in organizations is for groups to think together in a way that truly taps the wisdom and intelligence that is already present in the group; strategic dialogue involves collaborative conversations that require all voices to participate in complex issues where no one person has the whole answer. Exploring questions is an opportunity to explore mental models together. "Shifts in core assumptions... are a major source of innovation" (Brown and Bennet 1994, 3).

Strategic dialogue encourages a reflection on some of the basic metaphors used within the organization, since metaphors are guiding images. Their exploration contributes both to the understanding of the whole and increases consciousness as to the power of a metaphor to construct a reality. For Brown and Bennett, a shift in thinking requires a shift in guiding imagery. Their theory for their group stages in dialogue corresponds to the metaphor of making a stew: thin and watery...add different textures and flavors and spices...continue to stir...keep heat on...notice: "the pot thickens"..."rich and fulfilling" (13). This metaphor also serves as a way to think about the dialogue process itself: "Core questions" and "strategic issues" are placed in the stew and explored from all perspectives, the heat is noticed, and deeper assumptions are then explored and shared within a working community.

Another example of metaphor is their description of the new integration that occurs with the experience of group insight.
Like a kaleidoscope, where pieces of colored glass hold a pattern until a slow turn of the barrel causes them to suddenly cascade into a new configuration, generative learning creates coherence at a new level of complexity. (Brown and Bennett 1994, 13)

Using metaphors help us search for the heart of the matter and becomes a process which itself serves to deepen our understanding. As they explain, just as the conch shell spirals downward, inquiry in dialogue searches downward into underlying assumptions, connections; and then, releasing energy, spirals upwards into insight and possibilities.

The addition of visual imagery graphically recorded on flip charts and placed on the walls during strategic dialogue creates on the spot visual representation to help people "see" connections between ideas. Fragmentation, polarization, and inconsistencies are more easily noticed and the interdependencies of thinking can be highlighted. Participants are "literally surrounded by the larger picture as it emerges around them" (11). The visual displays allow the conversation about relationships to occur organically.

Brown and Bennett emphasize that Dialogue's transformative powers depend upon allowing the process to unfold. The secret is to allow ourselves to "risk being changed by what we hear" (10), and mutuality in dialogue depends on release from reactive and defensive postures. For these two writers, therefore, creating an inviting climate lies at the heart of dialogue potential. They describe elements for creating the spirit of inquiry as including: a setting with minimum distractions; relaxed context; making sure all voices are heard in the circle from the beginning; honoring the knowledge present in the participants; using questions that encourage people to look at the heart of the matter from their own experience; using questions that create curiosity, wonder, anticipation (rather than analysis); acknowledging the normalcy of comfortable and uncomfortable reactions to
others' perspectives; and providing tools, like visual language and graphic recording to enable relational thinking (5-6).

**A Course in the Dialogue Process**

In 1993 Lynn Dhority, a facilitator for the MIT Dialogue Project and a professor at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, conducted a 14 week experimental course entitled "The Dialogue Process" a part of the Critical and Creative Thinking Program. As a participant in this experiment, I found it unique, inspiring and revelatory, yet mystifying, since for the first time my class contained no certainties. Because the process was freeing, I felt refreshed, yet at the same time, I found it was physically unnerving. I considered the course to be a living "hands-on" laboratory, (practice field) for my awakened interest in critical and creative thinking. However, the thinking practice involved the collective as well as myself.

In his paper, "Dialogue in Educational Settings," Dhority overviews the Dialogue process: a) some of its theoretical components, b) reasons for including Dialogue in education, c) observations of the evolution of the group process while group and individual thinking skills develop; and d) reflections on the qualities and competencies for facilitating and participating in the Dialogue process. Dhority demystifies the Dialogue process, moving it away from an exercise for intellectuals. Dialogue concerns "something that deeply educates--how to think together critically, creatively and compassionately" (1993, 6). He believes that group-centered learning rather than teacher or student centered learning is the type of learning we need in our schools: "[T]rue learning involves the learning connection [teachers and students] share" (6).
The deepest power centers of learning, he finds, as "the essence qualities of the learner (including the teacher)" (8). Because Dialogue holds a space of supreme respect for the self and others, "we begin to not only see and affirm the essences of others, but we begin to see and understand ourselves beneath the labels and beliefs we create ourselves with" (8). In this way Dialogue emerges as one way in which this essence can be unfolded and opened to great possibilities. Through dialogue creativity and curiosity is rekindled, and this means that learning from a different place is actually occurring.

Dhority notes several striking features about the evolving dialogue process in his course. Initially, feelings and energy were high as hope of communicating in a new way was enthusiastically welcomed. As the hard work of Dialogue was confronted, frustration mounted "as people experienced the challenge of listening, being misunderstood, and alienated by various styles, tempos, and opinions" (2). The class reached a turning point with individual attempts at suspending assumptions and opinions, and inquiry into the group process. Individuals forged new ways of responding to others and to themselves. In final weeks came "an ongoing dance between enthusiasm, doubt, even skepticism, and sustained listening and inquiry" (3). The 14 weeks allotted for the course brought an initial understanding and practice of dialogue skills, but the class concurred that the course had ended just as most members were beginning to "get it," and had just begun to show increased Dialogue capacity.

Dhority distinguishes between a Dialogue "leader" and "facilitator," underlying the need for teachers to shift their traditional attitudes and beliefs as a prerequisite for introducing dialogue into their classrooms. Bohm describes dialogue as a conversation between
equals; even the most sensitive "leader" exerts a sense of control that could hinder sharing, thus diminishing the open, positive climate of the Dialogue process (Bohm 1991, 14). The art of Dialogue facilitation is, rather, the "challenge of supporting the creation of a viable 'container' to hold the often intense fragmentation and incoherence of feelings, thoughts, and opinions in a group..." (Dhority 1993, 10). Dhority believes that facilitators assist the dialogue process best by modeling skilled dialogue themselves. That is, facilitators remain in the role of "learner" participant rather than "knower" or "teller." Dialogue seeks to honor each individual's place of learning; schools, traditionally remain places of control. Teachers are traditionally seen as conveyers of truth and wisdom, rather than being themselves students of wisdom and truth. Thus, establishing a dialogue-based classroom requires that both teacher and student become learners. The dialogue process is seen as a vehicle whereby both learn to truly listen to each other and themselves with compassion. In this way, "social and cultural hierarchy can dissolve into mutual respect" (Dhority 1993, 8).

In a subsequent paper, Dhority describes "dialogue basics," such as the circle, the "talking stick or stone" and slowing down (1995). He also elaborates on key elements of dialogue like "suspending assumptions." He offers a story of an actual experience that a dialogue group had when someone displayed curiosity as to a "mildly anti-Semitic attribution" a person had discovered in their inner thought. The story demonstrated how individual and group appreciation for inquiry and curiosity can invite others to surface their own opinions and assumptions, and how this process awakens and expands group member's curiosity. Such stories also offer a picture of how the dialogue process unfolds
as a "container" of inquiry, tension, respectful listening, passionate expression and compassionate curiosity.

What we first must do, Dhority suggests, is **notice** our thoughts ---to uncover what we are speaking or thinking. We can then take the next step to "hold our assumptions more lightly---with an attitude of 'this is what I think, and I may not be right; I am willing to inquire even further into my thoughts and to have them potentially disconfirmed or at least qualified'" (1995, 8). Passionately held views are still possible, but Dhority says that group members must be willing to continue to inquire into their own assumptions in a public discovery, so that "they can rub up against other assumptions" (9). In this way new intelligence remains a fertile potential and the door stays open for learning and change. Says Dhority:

> In the past I may have frequently behaved defensively with reference to my core beliefs. I didn't allow them to mingle with 'the enemy'--their opposites. In dialogue I seek to do just the contrary. I place (suspend) my opinions out next to their opposites--trusting. They are safe, in the sense that nothing is going to be decided about them; no vote taken; no request for support. My opinions are just going to 'hang out' with other beliefs and assumptions. Amazingly, what often happens, is that my and other's assumptions undergo a change without anyone intending it. It may be that I simply leave the dialogue with my opinions less emotionally charged. I may feel less positioned, more inclusive, more open. Almost always I walk away more reflective, often more humble and compassionate in relationship to others and to myself. (Dhority 1995, 9)

### A Paradigm Shift in Education

Sue Miller Hurst, herself once a school principal, and Peter Senge, a leader in systems theory in organizational development, co-authored a concept paper in 1992 called, "Educare': The Learning Initiative" in which they outline the challenge for education today as they see it. They propose innovation based upon **Educare'**, a Latin word meaning...
"to lead out." Education, they assert, means more than "schooling"; "it is a primary means by which we determine our collective fate" (Hurst and Senge 1992, 2). In order to move forward we must have a willingness to learn, a willingness intrinsic to the Dialogue process.

The purpose of their initiative is to address static educational practices by creating climates of inquiry and learning throughout the entire community. Such climates lead everybody, ultimately, into new thinking processes, and to new ways of knowing and interacting. Innovation in classrooms, one of the "cornerstones" for a systemic approach, comes when teachers understand basic principles of the design of "learning space," which fosters a) student ownership of learning; b) use of constructivist pedagogy; c) student interaction with objects of the real world; d) learning seen as relational, focused on patterns and collaborative in nature. Such an approach focuses on ability not disability, moves beyond superficial tolerance, and offers divergent processes to enhance learning and to expand capacities of mind through expanded environments for learning (3-4).

A second cornerstone involves the concept of the whole school as a high performance team of learners and inquirers. Listening and sharing become the heart of interaction. Collective inquiry focuses on the assumptions behind our words and actions. Talk is quiet and reflective where people can discover patterns of behavior that create structures that limit possibility and "find the points of leverage where we can effectively move the forces that have beleagured us" (5). The elements for the practice of such communication lay in the "core leadership disciplines" of Senge's work: building shared vision, personal mastery, mental models, team learning and systems thinking.

62
A third cornerstone involves community learning: "You never educate a child without educating a community" (Hurst and Senge 1992, 6). Community leadership is given the task of transforming the relationship between the whole school and community.

We will need to redefine the work of superintendents and school board members, the official link of accountability between schools and their community, and we will need to help these people to develop the skills to be proactive leaders for fundamental change. Most of all, our places of learning can invite the community to a boundary-less, co-creative mentorship. The school can be a center for community building, for consciousness raising, for renewing our care and commitment for our children, and for participatory planning for the future. (6)

A New Way of Managing

Using the Dialogue process teaches people to think together differently because their way of knowing and thinking changes through Dialogue interactions. In Dialogue people have to change the way they interact. The development of safe spaces for learning, for reflection and experimentation create "learning organizations." In "Communities of Commitment: The Heart of Learning Organizations," authors Fred Kofman and Peter Senge define learning organizations as "a new vision of organizations, capable of thriving in a world of interdependence and change" (Kofman and Senge 1993, 2). However, this new vision requires a basic shift in perception: "The changes go beyond individual corporate cultures, or even the culture of Western management; they penetrate to the bedrock assumptions and habits of our culture as a whole" (2).

Whereas in *The Fifth Discipline, The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization*, Senge's model remains theoretical, this paper addresses the personal relevance of that theoretical basis for the new managerial direction. The significance of Kofman and Senge's work is that it emphasizes the importance of "personal
transformation" as the vehicle for this larger paradigmatic shift in perception which will result in more favorable climates for a new way of learning. They conclude that "the only safe space to allow for this transformation is a learning community" (Kofman and Senge 1993, 2).

Thus their work has now begun to evolve in partnership with management liaisons from business communities. Through such involvement, they have identified three fundamental problems--fragmentation, competition and reactiveness. In a time when we ought to cooperate and share knowledge, in order to create insight into our issues, "[Our over emphasis on competition makes looking good more important than being good]" (6).

Thus, in business organizations, we sacrifice learning in an atmosphere of competition over who is right, who is most persuasive, and most articulate. Learning in this framework is typically driven by fear, the fear of not being 'right'. To acknowledge that there are things we don't know and that we are not good at, is a sign of weakness prevalent in the wider culture (6).

Their observations have also lead to the conclusion that our learning hardly ever is tied to our innate curiosity. "The problem is that our current institutions exercise authority in a way that undermines our intrinsic drive to learn" (6-7). Erased from significance is our own curiosity; we learn to pay attention to the teacher's questions, as opposed to our own. We also develop a mentality that problems occur 'out there' without respect to our involvement with what seems to be 'out there'. Management personnel are viewed as problem solvers, who seek to change an undesirable external condition. The problem with this model, they suggest, is that it prevents steady improvement because it does not predispose
a system to continuous learning. Another mode is necessary for continuous learning: the creating mode. "The impetus for change in the creating mode comes from within" (7). With it comes the sense of individual and collective power necessary for establishing a commitment to building learning organizations.

To help transform organizations into communities of learning, the Learning Center has designed a five-day introductory course to open a practice field for systems thinking, dialogue, along with reflecting and articulating personal visions. Liaison officials have called this course, a "piercing experience" (18), suggesting its transformative quality.

The course seeks to create experiences for reflecting on what it means to view the world in parts and separate from ourselves, and leading us out to a new view of the world as a system that incorporates our ways of perceiving as an integral part of understanding the whole. In stepping towards the Kofman and Senge systems model we are changing our perception of self; in the old paradigm self is seen as an observer, separate self, but in the new paradigm, self is integrated with the whole, one cannot be apart from what one observes. We become active participants in an ongoing subjective creation of the world.

Often breaking things into parts is essential to operationalizing the system, but divisions of this nature can often appear as rigid ties. We must remember the trap of such distinctions in order to reestablish fluidity (11). Senge and Kofman quote Martin Buber's insight that if we see a human only in terms of his/her attributions, we no longer see the whole person; "he is no longer my Thou."

Thus, the process of shifting paradigms involves the community nature of self. At the core of the atom is nothing, only pure energy. This discovery that revolutionized the
physical sciences has insightful implications on the perception of self; "we are startled to
discover that at the core of the person, at the center of selfhood there is ... nothing, pure
energy" (11). Kofman and Senge argue that in this center of pure energy, or "pregnant
void," we are a "web of relationships." When we talk about ourselves we speak about
"family, work, academic background, sports affiliations," but "self" eludes us.

The answer is nowhere, because the self is not a thing, but, as Jerome Brun­
ner says, "a point of view that unifies the flow of experience into a coherent
narrative"---a narrative striving to connect with other narratives and
become richer. (Kofman and Senge 1993, 11)

Thus, these writers conclude that there is no primordial origin, no human nature
independent of culture. The culture in which we were raised is the culture that gives us
definition and shapes us in the likeness of its own cultural model. When we forget
culture's shaping force, viewing ourselves as independent of societies' forces that have
shaped us, "we identify our egos with our selves" (11). The affect of this forgetfulness, is
a "spurious security and stability" (11).

Separating our selves from the community that defines us, "we assign a primordial
value to our ego (part) and see the community (whole) as secondary" (11). In indigenous
cultures of southern Africa relationship is primary, and upon meeting, individuals greet
each other with the expression, "I see you." To them this means: I note you in relationship
to me, therefore, you can now be aware of your existence. For us, Kofman and Senge state,
this viewpoint may seem "crazy," because in our perception our self is already defined and
fixed as separate from and outside our system (11).

This tenancy toward separation and defined, fixed quality is apparent in our
Western view of an objective reality. We see reality as 'out there', separate from ourselves
since we exist 'in here'. Kofman and Senge question whether reality exist as "inseparable from our language and our actions" (12). What if we are a part of instead of apart from our observations of reality? They suggest we need to understand that we invent structures and distinctions to organize the information of life ("the unmanagable flow of life") and that our inventions represent the territory without being the territory; "the map is not the territory" (12). Furthermore, we need to understand that we have access only to the "map" of our culture. Beneath all maps is pure interpretation, and thus, there is no "ultimate ground."

The danger of a good map is that "the thinking behind it can become entrenched and disregard the necessary context of its effectiveness" (12). The tenancy to generalize "its validity to universal categories" hinders our capacity to interact with the world freshly. In relying on stale maps and static ways of knowing, we cease to generate fresh interpretations. Kofman and Senge believe "[t]he best constructs for explaining and organizing the world will imitate life itself" (12). Thus, our thinking will be in a continual state of becoming. We, thus, approach our ways of knowing from fresh, unfolding experience, what Einstein called "the experience of the mysterious."

The relevance of methodologies that allow us to look at the fragmentation of our thinking such as Dialogue now demonstrate their relevance as part of understanding the whole. Because our culture imbues us with a sense of separation and a need to find quick solutions to problems, little energy has been put toward reflecting upon our underlying thinking. In a learning community, not only is cognitive reflection relevant, but also emotional and physical aspects of our wholeness. To be in a Dialogue process, then is to invite a stream of meaning, to really learn, freed from our limiting maps. The process becomes
inseparable from the content. This is the key tenet, that, once understood, opens individuals to shift into a new paradigm of thinking and interacting.

But in a system everything is apart of a whole and in thinking systemically we learn to understand how to bring our observer-self into the system. This means that all of the observer is part of the system—fears, reactions, concerns, headaches, thinking, hopes, and assumptions, i.e., all aspects of our being. In learning about an issue, instead of zooming in and focusing our attention analytically on a single part, we zoom out instead, focusing our attention on the interactions of self around the issue. In collectively sharing our self-reflections we learn in a new way that no analytic thinking can offer. Articulating the meaning that the energy around an issue has for us helps us discover the relational aspects to the issue and thus, we move naturally to a larger understanding of the whole.

The capacity to enter into a Dialogue process is critically affected by our understanding of the inseparable nature of the process and the content, the observer and the observed. This new understanding engenders the subsequent capacity to be in the creating mode, where "language functions as a device for connection, invention and coordination" (Kofman and Senge 1993, 13) in the service of the whole. In learning organizations a Dialogue process offers a possibility of creating "a field of alignment that produces tremendous power to invent new realities in conversation, and to bring about these new realities in action" (13).
Reform is badly needed, yet people’s experience with change is overwhelmingly negative—imposition is the norm, costs outweigh benefits, the few successes are short-lived. The only way out of this dilemma is for individuals to take responsibility for empowering themselves and others through becoming experts in the change process... Individuals must begin immediately to create a new ethos of innovation—one that has the ability to permit and stimulate individual responsibility, and to engage collectively in continuous initiative, thereby preempting the imposition of change from outside.

Acting on change is an exercise in pursuing meaning. Selected educational reform that takes individual meaning and development seriously not only stands a better chance of being implemented; it also offers some hope for combating the stagnation, burnout, and cynicism of those in schools—which in the long run will lead to the desiccation of all promising change. (Italics mine.)

Michael Fullan in The New Meaning of Educational Change

In this chapter I will share my personal conclusions from my own learning in the Dialogue process as they have related to my involvement as school committee member, teacher and parent. There are several disciplines I have found central to learning and practicing of Dialogue: Learning to notice, listen, suspend, wonder, speak, display, be silent and disidentify, have facilitated my own expanding capacity to keep myself in a "learning space" rather than a place of "reaction" or "certainty." I will also probe into the relationship of metacognition to the Dialogue process since each helps to better define the other; thus, together they become more instructive for newly emerging possibilities in our
thinking processes.

My initial exposure to the Dialogue process involved me in a remarkable experiential process, initially consisting of an inner sense of liberation. However, learning Dialogue was at times intimidating because there were no recipes for doing it "right" or quick fixes for group or individual procedures. Dialogue has no real "rules," just guidelines, and even those differ slightly from group to group. Also, people enter a Dialogue group with different experiences underpinning their understanding of Dialogue. For instance, I have never participated in a group which uses dancing and music as part of its introductory atmosphere, although I understand that this is now common and might provide a wonderful new dialogical dimension. Dialogue affects people in varying ways, so my experiences are, of course, unique. Here I do not propose that the Dialogue process be seen through my particular lens; rather my interest is to share my ideas and experiences in order to provide others with one of many perceptions of the process. I suspect few people that have engaged in a Dialogue process would quibble over the personal nature of the Dialogue experience. Perhaps intentionality, or personal commitment to creating a learning climate, or "safety zone" (McDonough 1994) might be one of the few agreed upon tenets. One can learn about dialogue by actually doing it, but one can also learn through the experiences of others and their learning process. Both are congruent with a dialogical, wholistic approach that emphasizes how multiple perspectives can broaden and affect our understanding.

When I am in "learning space" I am aware that I am practicing certain disciplines that develop my capacity to remain in this generative mode:
Learning to Notice: "All of us have the capacity to be mindful. All it involves is cultivating our ability to pay attention in the present moment..." (Kabat-Zinn, 11). For me, this is the primary discipline and its practice develops my capacity for greater awareness. As I practice noticing I try to distinguish between the data of my perceptions, (what I observe through my senses that others can validate) and the interpretations I give to what I perceive. For me, paying attention to my feelings and my somatic signals cues me to notice my related thinking that has acted as the driving force of the interpretations.

Learning to Listen: When another is speaking, listening deeply with full attention allows me to embrace that person's experience, to become curious, and to inquire into another's experiences in order to learn more. Further reflecting on my listening I begin to wonder: Am I evaluating what I hear? Am I preparing a response? Am I reacting favorably and therefore, feeling unified with others? Am I reacting unfavorably and therefore, feeling challenged or threatened and so feel inclined to defend my position? Listening does not reach a destination, acquired skill or goal, it always leads to a deeper level of listening.

Learning to Suspend: By suspending judgement, I begin to notice how my thought processes actually do a lot of the driving; suspension itself serves to slow down my entire thought process. Without suspending, my good intentions will be suppressed by the quickness of my mind and I will rush to judge, or to find myself on "automatic pilot" (Kabat-Zinn, 21) assuming that I "know" about something. By suspending I remind myself to take the time to be a "learner."

Once on the school committee I facilitated a collective suspension by allowing
several months to pass before bringing a pressing issue to a vote. During this time people were able to air their concerns in public forums. Although the superintendent favored speedy closure, I chose to delay the vote so all voices might be heard. At the time of the vote, the only remaining dissension was the superintendent! I was particularly interested to note that one school committee member radically changed her opinion during this process without the caustic side-effects involved in ongoing debate and discussion.

**Learning to Wonder:** When I was first practicing Dialogue, most of the time I didn’t feel curious about things because I was too intent on trying to understand what I was supposed to be doing. Once I began to practice suspending my thoughts more routinely, I became curious about what was happening at the group level. Also, a sense of curiosity about myself and my own thinking processes has emerged more recently as I continue to internalize the meaning of my own paradigm shift. As a result, my own understanding of Dialogue keeps deepening. For instance, while reading about the contributions of Fred Kofman and Peter Senge’s article on "Communities of Commitment," I began to internalize the concepts of the community nature of the self, the self as in-process and the semi-permeable nature of our identities.

From the above disciplines a sense of wonder has emerged on its own, a signal perhaps that a new non-reactive, self-monitoring system is operating within my new thinking. In a sense my learning to wonder as an adult recaptures the essence of the wondering mind of a young child. Within this growing sense of wonder, there exists no edge of judgement, and it is here that my capacity for inquiry has emerged. Inquiry emerging out of wonder is strikingly different from inquiry that comes through problem solving.
or task orientation. In my opinion inquiry used in problem solving is driven by a hidden set of assumptions and is capable of reflection only within this set of assumptions. But since inquiry from wonder emulates from an intuitive space, it remains free from a set agenda or focus and can explore the assumptions that exist in our presuppositions. To inquire from a point of natural wonder is to be in learning space.

Being in learning space feels freeing. As I become more aware through better and better noticing, I am able to distinguish between reacting and learning, and to be more conscious of the choices that I have. For example, in the past, if one of my children had interrupted me while I was busy at my computer, I would have politely said I couldn’t talk just then. While I didn’t like the interruption, I never felt comfortable sending my children away. Under the influence of dialogical practice, I decided to suspend my notion of interruption as a problem, and one day as I sat working on the computer my son appeared. My whole demeanor was different. When he spoke, I listened and acknowledged him. He then left and I returned my focus to my work. My experience was one of easy flow, no obstacles, and no tension. Learning and practicing Dialogue has given me a sense of calm and openness to learning and changing.

Learning to Speak: The first "direction" I remember practicing in Lynn Dhority’s class on the Dialogue process was "no rehearsing." As we listened to what others said in the circle, we would practice noticing our attempts at designing what we wanted to say when it came our turn to speak. The class discipline was to stay in the moment and speak without internal outlines. Following this plan of no rehearsing initially allowed me to notice and acknowledge my thoughts as they occurred without reacting to them. When my
turn came, I can recall trying to speak in the present, and for example, feeling nervous in
the group and simply expressing my feeling of nervousness. I was guided by the simplicity
of the Native American tradition of Council where the rules were: 1) Speak honestly from
the heart; 2) Be brief; and, 3) Listen from the heart.

As my Dialogue capacities evolve I notice that my ability to speak honestly from
the heart is connected closely with my ability to notice proprioceptively. I have begun to
understand how my feelings, emotions and sensations are driven by embedded cultural
knowledge and I treat most sensations now as gifts of potential learning and grist for my
mill.

"Speaking honestly from the heart" is a phrase I return to time and time again. It
reminds me of several things that I tend to forget: 1) That my voice is important to add to
the voices of others because collectively we can come to better understandings; 2) That
when I speak, I speak for myself and about myself; I thus put the center of responsibility
on myself and relegate my behavior of "blaming" to my previous paradigm focusing on
"objective reality" and "isolated behaviors"; and, 3) That my honest speaking will contrib­
ute to a safe climate that will encourage others to do the same.

*Learning to Display:* To display means to speak openly about that which I noticed
and suspended, in order to explore my underlying assumptions more fully. For me this is
perhaps the most difficult discipline to practice. It appears to be directly connected to my
ability to notice my mind/body reactions which require me to be fully aware. When I first
learned to suspend, I envisioned placing my thoughts and opinions on a shelf so I wouldn’t
react to them, but I didn’t necessarily think of displaying them. As I become better able
to stay curious and remain in learning space I become freer to display whatever emerges into my mental spaces.

Learning to be with Silence: Trying to fill the gaps between words with more words is action intended to cure the awkwardness of silence. If we proceed through life unaware and "half-awake" (Kabat-Zinn) we will never learn the potential richness of these moments. Learning to be with silence also helps slow down thinking and creates space for staying in the moment and for noticing our mind/body wholeness.

Learning to disidentify: All of the above disciplines contribute to my ability to disidentify from any particular opinion I have about topics at hand. For me the discipline of suspending is a form of temporary disidentification, but real disidentification feels more permanent and free from inner tension. Learning to disidentify is particularly helpful for me in committee work where the atmosphere may not feel psychologically safe. Previously my tendency in such environments has been to withdraw from tension. My mind would physically shut down and I would feel like I could no longer think to fashion "an argument." Even my first class in Dialogue rendered me freer to engage with others and to share my own perspective, not with an intention to convert or persuade but rather to deliver my own meaning into the pool of many. At the same time I work at staying open. For example, a proposed sexual abuse policy that had been created by a large representative committee came before the school committee for approval but was strongly objected to by a member of the community who had had direct experience with a sexual harassment incident the previous year. Some had labeled this lone voice a troublemaker (literally), expressing a disbelief that anyone could object to a proposal which had received so much
input. I was told that to question a proposal that emerged from such a representative group would be tantamount to a rebuff of the entire work of the committee. The abuse proposal was extremely long and involved, requiring the committee’s attention over several meetings. Again, under Dialogue influences, I decided that I needed to be a “heard voice.” I came fully prepared with what I wanted to say. I spoke without hesitation directly to the issue and provoked the expected intense reaction. Having decided ahead of time to suspend my reaction to other’s reactions, I did not respond with defensiveness, nor did I withdraw. Another member came to my defense. I was glad for that, not that I needed personal comfort, but because another voice in the room was then heard.

I believe the Dialogue process holds great potential for cases of this nature, not so much because they are controversial, but because everyone has a valuable opinion. Learning to respect such diversity around a single issue is paramount to collective learning. Had the committee working on the sexual harassment policy begun in a spirit of Dialogue, acknowledging and honoring the diversity of people’s opinions and ideas, it might have resulted in a greater understanding of the many facets that were involved, facets that were really not demonstrated until those in disagreement began picking the proposal apart.

The above disciplines incorporates an expanded sense of the concept of metacognition, the act of learning about one’s own thinking. Metacognition has been defined as the act of becoming increasingly aware of one’s own thinking in three ways: 1) to learn to identify the thinking skill (for instance, predicting), 2) to practice the skill by application of a strategy, and 3) to reflect on thinking in order to learn how to monitor it and improve thinking (Swartz and Perkins 1990). The reflective aspect of metacognition contains a few
seeds of an “internal” dialogue as the “individual reflects upon his or her thinking before and after—or even in the middle of—the process, pondering how to proceed and how to improve” (52). "Metacognition usually involves shifting our attention away from what it is we are thinking about and focusing it on our own thinking" (178), and it is similar to the Dialogue process which doesn’t focus primarily on content. But, whereas metacognition stresses the importance of learning and practicing thinking skills and monitoring their use, concerning itself with specific skills and an individual’s use of them, the Dialogue process emphasizes the proprioceptive information available at any one moment in order to learn and understand the connections between feeling and thinking.

Here, it is possible to see how metacognition and the Dialogue process can inform one another. To illustrate, reflect upon the science curriculum story presented in Chapter I where decisions to change the science curriculum were imposed from without, through hierarchy. If I reflect upon my thinking metacognitively, that is with the intent to improve it, I might begin by acknowledging which skills I used and which I did not: 1) I compared different leadership styles of hierarchical and collaborative direction, 2) I questioned (in my mind) the accuracy of the information from the superintendent, 3) and, I drew a causal relationship between the superintendent’s leadership style and the controversy I believed it created. What I did not do was either to marshal more data, or to challenge the assumptions of the administration or explore the issue deeply, since the non-collaborative atmosphere surrounding the incident was keeping many doors closed. (For example a policy existed that prevented individual school committee members from speaking privately to individual staff; furthermore, the superintendent refused to subscribe to a public deliberation.) In
using a Dialogue process for that situation my intent would be to understand the bigger picture rather than the linear occurrence of events or causal reasoning. Of primary importance would be the web of relationship between all involved parties. If all parties were to gather and each person offered not only their thinking but whatever had “heart and meaning for them” (Brown and Bennett 1994) then all parties would have the opportunity to expand their own understanding of the ways we had previously defined the situation. Our meaning (of what happened) would then begin to be re-defined as a collection of interrelationships rather than independently existing perceptions, perspectives or skills. Understanding the science curriculum change is comparable to the blind people examining different parts of the elephant; each one can only explain their perception in terms of their experience, while obviously there is much more to an elephant than the discrete parts. Thus, there is more to understanding thinking than just understanding the thinking skills used by one individual. Gathering to collectively understand our thinking skills, our own points of view, the assumptions upon which these points of view are formed, and the feelings people hold around an issue offers us something more, the possibility of collectively coming to a new shared meaning, a different level of understanding—the level of the whole.

The second essential characteristic that emerges as a Dialogue process develops is the creation of a sense of safety where all can learn and be changed. I find this aspect of Dialogue to be unique to the Dialogue process and seldom given value or attention in discussions of metacognitive processes. As Anne McDonough has stated so explicitly:

Dialogue works developmentally. The more we learn to listen with a new open perspective, the more we become able to create a space where other
people feel they are heard, accepted, and validated. The adult safety zone means others can then take expressive risks. More and more individuals can then step forward, displaying more of their own seldom shared thoughts and thinking. As a result, we all learn (McDonough 1994, 38-39).

One of the encouraging aspects of viewing change from the perspective of meaning lies in both "the realization that there are problems and responsibilities at every level in the educational system" (Pullan 1991, 351) and that purposefully opening ourselves up to the meaning of others necessitates opening ourselves up to the multiple aspects of meaning found at every level of the educational system. While the administrators and school committees remain threatened by the diversity of opinion, few "learningful" conversations will take place.

In listening to the opinion of one superintendent I noticed my own sense of feeling shut out and invalidated. In his opinion conversations of controversial nature are useless and will merely become debates; too many people base their opinions on feelings and what they think rather than upon the larger body of known research. This superintendent believes that until everyone can view education as a science, basing their practices on what we "know" to be best for children, we will not have reform, merely debate. The nature of his particular way of thinking that requires others in the educational community to understand the issues in the "right" way before conversations can become a reality, is a typical example of the lack of learning orientation in our present leadership. When our leadership requires such prerequisites, conversations seldom happen. When they do, the subtle (or not so subtle) implied message is that learning and change is already quite limited.

Therefore, one of the profound problems in public education is that while we
expect changes in student learning through the application of constructivist theory of learning and knowledge, we fail to see the connection between the personal growth and development of teachers, administrators and parents (the adult community) as they work on their own ability to learn and change in the learning environments that they create for students. Educational reform must begin with such adult growth, since true learning means that "as individuals we cannot wait for or take as sufficient the actions or policy decisions of others. It would be a mistake to conclude that the solution is for policymakers and administrators to become experts in the change process" (Pullan, 353). Using the Dialogue process helps us create community conversations that transcend individual opinion and send forth a new message: that at the heart of true reform lies a willingness to listen, inquire and be changed that includes everyone.

Coping with change effectively requires that we explicitly think and worry about the change process. We should constantly draw on knowledge about the factors and insights associated with successful change processes. But we must employ this knowledge in a nonmechanical manner along with intuition, experience, and assessment of the particular situation, each time adding to our store of common knowledge. Respecting the change process means seeking common patterns while being prepared for uniqueness. This amounts to being self-conscious about the change process as it affects us, and promoting collective self-consciousness about how the process affects others.

There are no short-cuts, and there is no substitute for directly engaging in improvement projects with others. Like most complex endeavors, in order to get better at change we have to practice it on purpose. What makes this guideline all the more important is that we can be assured that countless others around us will not be respecting the change process in their hurry to impose or avoid change. (Pullan 1991, 350)

The president of a union for a Midwest steelmill has described his dialogue experiences in a way that echoes my own: "I think there is a beginning to dialogue, but I do not think there is an end" (in Isaacs, 1993, 24). As I have experienced this Dialogue process,
we just keep practicing. That is all there is. Each experience contains the potential for learning about ourselves and fosters new awareness as to our own barriers to productive reasoning and behavior. The potential power of the Dialogue process lies in productively practicing its disciplines. Practiced as a set of behaviors dialogue disciplines provide direct possibilities for experiencing how multiple perspectives of knowing the world are possible. Practiced as a way of "being," (actually embodying these disciplines), involves an initial blurring of distinctions, categories, roles and responsibilities. Uncertainty, initially unstabilizing, feels successively more freeing the more it is practiced and given value. To embody Dialogue is to view life and its relationships as work in process, and to come to see self-knowledge as being simultaneously momentary and dynamic. Embodying Dialogue also means being open to experience in ways that allow the experience to become the conscious mirror of our feelings and thoughts. To paraphrase Jon Kabat-Zinn, director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, a dog doesn’t change by the way you look at it. It is always just what it is. That is why dogs, flowers, mountains and the sea are such great teachers. They reflect our minds. It is our minds that change. Learning to notice our mind’s work reflects our capacity to be present in the moment, using our senses, the instruments of our observations, as guides to explore the underlying assumptions of our thoughts, opinions and thinking.

For me, the spirit of dialogue is like a dance where many dancers dance their individual parts, but at the same time are part of the larger dance. Each player is separate, but the dance cannot be reduced. The dance is the whole and each player weaves strands of the dance in their own way, in relationship to everyone else.
There are some in the educational community that are learning this dialogical dance, this new way of thinking and being. It is difficult at present for these new learners to find much support within our present hierarchical systems. However, as pockets of learners continue to expand, learning, creativity and change are bound to increase. Dialogue involves a continuous process of self-renewal in which the wonder, freshness, and depth of new learning becomes its own motivation to continue. It is through individual motivation in practicing the disciplines of Dialogue that our schools will become institutions of continuous self-renewal, able to create teaching and learning environments engaging for all.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


