

Dialogue Course at U-Mass Boston
Syllabus for Fall 2011
CRCRTH616

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Definition: Dialogue is designed to create meaning collectively through a group process that involves in-depth listening, suspending judgment and thinking about your thinking. You are asked to make your thought process visible as you develop your opinions. In this process, instead of imposing your thoughts on others, you invite others to add new dimensions to what you or they are thinking.

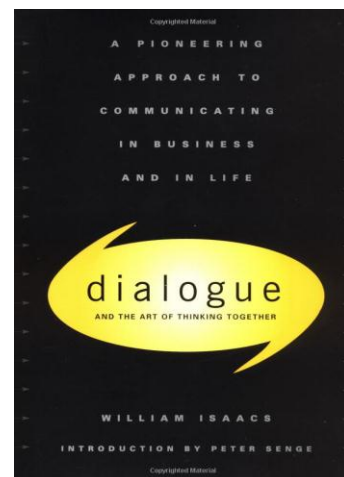
The Art of Dialogue: You also begin to realize in Dialogue that you may have only a partial view of a given topic and that you will need the collective views of the group to gain a larger, more comprehensive view of the whole truth. The purpose of this special conversation is to bring out our inner wisdom of individuals and the collective wisdom of the Dialogue.

The Dialogue Process: In Dialogue, which is an unhurried process, you learn to listen without the intent of defending a position. Instead, you are asked to give enough space for the speaker to fully develop what he or she has to say. Then you can be encouraged to let your inquiries, or questions, emerge from a deep place of wonderment within yourself.

Course Requirements:

Use a Daily Journal keeping to save your thoughts, ideas and insights and how to reference them.

Read two Assignments on your own from Chapters in the Text and/or pertinent Articles and then describe what you learned.



Two short papers on the realistic and creative application of modern Dialogue.

Member participation in learning about early use of Dialogue in ancient history.

Learn about Sophocles as the earliest teacher and what it cost him.

Final paper (6 pages typed) due last day of class.

Text Book: Dialogue, *and the art of thinking together*

Author: William Isaacs, MIT

ISBN 385-47999-9

Published by Doubleday, New York

Building Dialogical Skills

Guidelines for the Dialogue Process

The Container

The dialogue process makes use of a Container. This holds the guidelines that are recommended behaviors for a Dialogue group. By adhering to these behaviors described in the Container, the group can create its own safe environment for a richly textured dialogue that is charged with meaning and purpose.

The Container: Short Version

1. Be aware of your assumptions
2. Listen to your listening

3. A collective meaning
4. Speak the truth as you see it
5. Look for connecting patterns
6. Thinking about your thinking
7. Nurture emerging ideas
8. Use both Advocacy and Inquiry
9. Suspend judgment
10. Finding your own voice

The Container: Expanded Version

Note: Take time as a group at the end of each dialogue to reflect on the most significant themes that emerged and how the dialogue experience could be improved in both content and process. Make notes about it in your journal.

The Power of Assumptions: Sometimes we are aware of our assumptions. Sometimes not. Assumptions are not the same as facts. They can't be proven, but they are often a "self fulfilling prophecy." For instance, if you may assume that each speaker in the Dialogue session has something of value to contribute, you may find that to be true.

Listening to Your Listening: Dialogue is about understanding and learning together. It is not about who has the right answer. Rather, it is about arriving at a new and more comprehensive level of understanding. Listen with tolerance, understanding and compassion to the views of others, even when you differ.

A Collective Meaning: Look for how the parts of the dialogical conversation relate to each other. Seek a collective meaning that puts the parts together like a jigsaw puzzle. The well-known fable about the four blind men who examined an elephant illustrates this point. They

could only sense the parts; but not the whole.

Speak The Truth as You See It: Recognize that none of us has the whole truth, but each person can relate the truth as he or she sees it. When this occurs, gradually, through careful, unbiased listening and seeing, a more comprehensive view can begin to emerge.

Look for connecting patterns: Tune into the language, rhythms and sounds of dialogue. Listen as you would to the pattern of notes played by various instruments in a musical performance. Whether popular or classical, the interaction of themes is what makes the music. In dialogue it is what makes the meaning.

Thinking About Your Thinking: Make your thinking process visible. As you share an opinion, or a belief, include to the evidence it is based on, the assumptions you have made, and what led to your conclusion. How you arrive at your conclusion is as valuable as the conclusion itself. Avoid making general statements that show no rational process or careful study.

Nurture Emerging ideas: Nurture ideas that are in an early stage of development. Help sustain them by recognizing their potential value rather than pointing out their flaws and weaknesses. Consider innovative ways to put new ideas into practice.

Use both Advocacy and Inquiry: Balance advocacy (your opinion) with inquiry (your questions). In advocating offer, rather than *impose* your opinion and both how and why you formed it. In inquiry, seek clarification and a deeper more inclusive level of understanding. It is helpful for the dialogue process to advocate with humility and inquire with appreciation.

Suspend Judgment: Hold back the tendency to judge before a sufficient evidence is gathered. Remember that when hasty judgments are made, learning does not take place. Hold your judgments in suspension, away from your core self. Simply wait and observe, until more information is available.

Finding Your Own Voice: Instead of rehearsing in your mind about what

to say, speak spontaneously from the heart and let your own highest values shine through about what to say. Base your opinions on your own observations and experience

Weekly Reading Assignments:

(Note: These texts correlate with the materials in Iccacs book)

- 1. Read the Forward xv-xx, and the Introduction PP 1 through 14. (Optional)**
- 2. Chapter 1. PP 17-48. A Conversation With A Center, Not Sides.** In Dialogue we address the whole group by speaking to the center, not-one-on one. There is some self risk in this process in that we do not know how others will respond. But if we are candid and open, others will usually respond accordingly.
- 3. Chapter 2. PP 49-69. Why We Think Alone and What We Can Do About It.** In the words of William Isaacs: To think is to sense the emerging potential of a situation, to perceive what is not yet visible, and to give it voice. To think is also to listen to our own automatic reactions and gain a clear perspective on them.
- 4. Chapters 3-4, PP 70-109 The Timeless Way of Conversation and Listening.** Practicing empathic listening: Without listening, there is no learning. A conversation is a two way street, with give and take on both sides. In a group it comes from all sides seeking the wholeness that transcends the points of view of individuals.
- 5. Chapter 5-6, PP 110-158, Respecting and Suspending.** When we listen with respect we suspend judgment and recognize the value in what they say. We listen in a learning mode. All of us

have felt the painful rejection of speaking to someone who is preoccupied. Respect and Suspending Judgment frees us from false assumptions and faulty reasoning.

6. Chapter 7-8, PP 159-202, Voicing and Patterns of Action.

Our voice contains countless inflections that convey meaning, purpose and desire. The great Persian poet, Rumi conveyed it in these lines: "Define a narrow me and you starve yourself of yourself. Nail me down in a box of cold words and that box is your coffin...Why do you refuse to admit that who I am is not your perception...?"

7. Chapter 9, PP 203 to 238. Overcoming Structural Traps.

Open and Closed characterize our institutions, though like all systems, they are often too near us or too distant for us to perceive them. Families, Schools, Churches and Businesses all operate with functions that are systemic. However, since systems are highly predictable, and they are very difficult to and change.

8. Chapter 10-11, PP 239 to 290, Setting the Container and Fields of Conversation. The Container holds the conversation together like a basket of fruit. It creates an environment of mutual trust and respect that characterize the Dialogue process. Though the Dialogue group will pass through many different phases of development, there is always the Container there to hold it together.

9. Chapter 12-13, PP 291 to 320, Convening Dialogue and the Ecology of Thought. As Bill Isaacs tells us: In the fourth space of Dialogue people become quite understanding of one another in their ability to be articulate, because they experience their own limits. However, there can be an immense discovery that occurs when we find that the language we use often tends to blind us to certain experiences.

10. Chapter 14- 15, PP 321 to 359, Dialogue and the New Economy and Cultivating Organizational and System

Dialogue. Here Isaacs finds ways of restoring the place of The Good, The True and The Beautiful in our society and

11. Chapter 16-17, PP 360 to 403, Dialogue and Democracy and taking Wholeness Seriously. In late 60's, David Skaggs, a five-term Democratic congressman from Colorado, decided he had enough. Appalled by the quality of hostile debate and conflict, and disturbed by what he called *the metaphysics of* distrust among his fellow legislators in the US House to find a solution...

What We Learned

12. Revisiting The Themes:

In our applications of Critical and Creative Thinking we have explored archetypal patterns that emerge in the arts. These emergent themes renew our own inner spiritual energies and help us to recapture the lost vision of joy, peace and harmony in our life and work.

We explored questions such as: How do we recognize beauty in art, music and poetry? What motivates us? What gives us a deep sense of fulfillment and satisfaction? Can beauty be found in Chaos? The answers to these questions arise existentially; that is, from within ourselves. Behind the many masks we wear to play the part of our assigned roles in our life and work exists the person whom we really are. By exploring the moral aspects of CCT we can recapture a sense of purpose that comes from within, based on our own values and vision. Paying serious attention to our thinking habits and critically examining the power of assumptions can lift us beyond a drab, repetitive routine in what we think and do.

How does Inertia stymie our institutions and ourselves? Perhaps our vision and purpose, if it becomes collective, can unblock the inertia immersed in systems that stifle the flow of creative energy. Suspending blame, using compassion and forgiveness, instead can transform ourselves and others to discover new options and horizons. Realizing how our thinking habits affect our relationships opens new understanding and insight. Through patience and persistence we can learn to practice the art of inquiry with appreciation, and advocate with humility.



Beauty Incarnate

A Journey Toward Understanding and Learning

1. At first we met with the process called Critical and Creative Thinking (abbreviated CCT), a special, disciplined way of thinking that we endeavored to use as we attempted to solve problems. We also found CCT useful to find meaning in our life and work. To do that we turned to Creative Thinking in Art, Music and Literature and a critical examination of prevailing assumptions about today's world of work. We thoughtfully looked at the question, "Do you work and study with a sense of purpose and vision, or just take it as it comes?" Later, in Unit VII we explored the concept of Vision, Purpose and Goals with more in-depth and detail. The Discussion sessions added another dimension to what we were learning.
2. Then we took on lots of questions: Is there a criterion for beauty? Is beauty found only in the arts? Can it be present in organizational systems? Is it objective or subjective, or both? Is it personal or universal? What is in your frame of reference for aesthetic values? These presented new ways of looking at things and new ways of looking at others and ourselves. We saw that beauty has different meanings for different people and that beauty, in all its many forms, is not limited to the arts.
3. We took a look at the uses of Critical and Creative Thinking in Athletics. "Is the joy in the running, or in the race that's won?" as Emerson said. Think about it!

Is the game about winning or or how you played it? We also learned something about how a team can learn to think together. Metacognition is a big word that means thinking about your thinking or reflecting on your own thoughts, either individually or as a group: We explored in-depth how to evaluate the reliability, completeness and the sources of information, and how important it is to form opinions and judgments that are based on a thorough examination of the data.

4. We discussed the difficult task of identifying our Assumptions, and how these may be more obvious to others than to ourselves. We talked about the impact of hidden assumptions on ourselves and others. We looked at assumptions as a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” sometimes in a good way and sometimes bad. The good way is to assume you are capable of taking effective action because you have checked out your capabilities against a demanding challenge that confronts you. The bad way is when you make assumptions without examining them with care. This is where we can see the advantages of making clear our thinking process to ourselves and visible to others. The Thinking Steps can improve the quality of relationships and results.

5. We looked at the emergent theory of Chaos. We briefly explored David Peat's and John Briggs book, *Seven Lessons of Chaos*, which contains this quote: "From the chaos perspective, the real problem is that for a long time human beings have imposed ideologies of hierarchy, power, and competition on top of their natural tendencies to collective and creative activity." Yet Chaos does somehow transform itself into order in people's lives and in their work. Out of chaos emerges innovation and creativity. After WWII there was peace with Germany and Japan. The storm passes, leaving the air fresh and clear. Chaos happens to organizations when the strike is over and a new contract signed. Suspending judgment avoids Chaos, and sustains an open mind. Listening to your listening can have the same effect.

6. Overcoming Institutional "Inertia" which is very different from Chaos, requires the release of pent up anger and frustration that impedes the flow of energy throughout a dysfunctional system. Bringing together diverse components in a system, such as a cross functional team, that includes all stakeholders can address organizational problems and issues and thereby create a new flow of energy throughout the system. When blocks to exploring new ideas are removed, and labor and management can really “learn to listen” with respect for each other through a process of Dialogue that promotes understanding rather than

alienation. When that happens a creative problem solving process that uses creative thinking can arrive at new perspectives on all sides of the issues. The energies that were all blocked up in inertia before then are dispersed, making way for new energies to flow that allow for constructive change.

7. Your personal values: these are found in your Frame of Reference, where you store your memories, beliefs and attitudes. Every now and then it is worth it to critically examine what is in our personal Frame of Reference to check to see what is still timely and relevant and what should be discarded. When you raise to a conscious level, “what is in there,” you may want to revise some of your opinions that you formed years ago. Perhaps you have learned things about yourself, the opposite sex, older people, kids, etc. that you want to update now, based on what you have learned more recently in you life. Then you are less likely to have a knee jerk reaction, rather than a clearly thought out opinion based on current evidence. Probably updating your personal vision and purpose in your life and work is also needed on a regular basis. A critical and creative reflection on your values, goals and purpose in your work is needed because you know a lot more now than you when you were much younger. A critical study of the prevailing values, vision and purpose exemplified by your organization is also useful---particularly in comparing what is your own views on the subject.

8. The application of Critical and Creative Thinking to examine how we see the ecology of the planet is something we have largely ignored until recently. A Critical examination of what is happening to our forests, rivers and oceans is something that we can no longer ignore. We know that our surrounding natural environment is rapidly changing, due to pollution, urban sprawl, clear cutting and a host of other factors. Raising beliefs about our planet to a conscious level means that we have to respond to a crisis situation of global warming, carbon emission and waste accumulation. We need to respond with deliberation to these changes to our contaminated Ecology and learn to respect nature for the sake of our own time and that of future generations. Formulating a positive and creative approach to these issues is an urgent matter. We need to practice the use of Reflection and Inquiry in ever expanding circles of informed concern to promote understanding and to develop rapport with others who hold similar beliefs in their Frame of Reference.

9. Learn how to balance Advocacy (your opinion) with Inquiry (your questions). We advocate when we state an opinion. We need to be aware to help to

establish our credibility when we state the source of our opinion, such as the evidence it is based on, the authorities it draws from and even showing respect for other views of the matter under consideration. In advocating it is also important to know how to offer rather than to just impose our opinions. When inquiring, on the other hand, we seek clarification and a deeper level of understanding and meaning, acknowledging candidly what we don't know and want to learn. As in the old adage, "Take it with a grain of salt," which means to maintain a healthy skepticism when listening to the opinions of others. It is helpful in both of the processes to advocate with humility and inquire with appreciation because humility invites understanding and learning, and appreciation shows respect by recognizing value in what others have to say. We can also use Advocacy and Inquiry to arrive at a realistic appraisal of how our own thinking habits have a distinct bearing on our effectiveness.

10. The many beautiful aspects of Music: Tuning into the beat, sounds and rhythms of music stirs memory and desire. When we learn to listen for emerging patterns of notes played on variations of themes by the different instruments we learn to recognize the structures in music as an art form, whether it is classical, jazz, rock or whatever. As we acquire the capacity to recognize how these themes develop from an initial statement to further development --- and on to a contrasting themes that also develop, though differently. Then we see how the contrasting themes engage in a kind of point counter point that somehow becomes resolved at the end in triumph. Perhaps it is the dynamic relationships of the sounds of music that creates a meaningful pattern as the themes evolve, develop and then resolve once again. The same emerging patterns appear in other, widely different forms of music -- not just classical. Hold back the tendency to judge too quickly the kind of music that you are not familiar with. It takes time to learn how to appreciate different forms and styles of music. All of them, however, can convey meaning that can touch our emotions and deeply understand the "sound of music".

11. Suspending Judgment: The process of "suspending" holds back the tendency to be judgmental about everything --- especially ourselves. When we are Suspending Judgment we hold it in our awareness, but do not let it dominate our reactions. Rather, we can remain conscious of it's presence and critically examine what it is about. To work this through we can ask ourselves the question: "Why am I so angry about this?" Or, " Why am I so upset?" If we do that, we gradually begin develop a different perspective on what is happening.

Suspending judgment opens the way to learning and understanding, rather than blame or "searching for the guilty party". Rather, by suspending a strong feeling of judgment, we can begin to see a problem situation in a different perspective. We can begin to see that we might have made false assumptions. If we allow ourselves to stand back and disengage ourselves from irrational judgments, we can then respond rationally. When empowered by reason we can make a constructive and intelligent response. Finding out how to distinguish between informed judgment and biased judgment is the key to making a rational response. *We can also recognize that when hasty judgment appears, reason disappears.*

12. Moral obligations need to be taken seriously. At work they are required in dealing with associates, clients and even competitors. When morals are ignored or overlooked, the total fabric of what holds an organization together is torn and begins to unravel. Trust diminishes and negative energy, though hidden, prevails throughout the entire culture of the organization. What is the cost of deceit? Promises un-kept, unreliability, lies, lack of respect, etc. The disposition of everyone throughout the organization is corrupted. When we find ourselves in this kind of climate, we need to avoid hearsay, and blame. Rather, we can base our opinions on our own observation and experience. The influence of someone with who knows how to use and sustain moral reasoning can have a great impact. As Gandhi said, "You can be a living example of the change you desire." Identifying best practices and procedures, and then using them within an organization, you can also help to turn things around. When the standards of ethics are observed and respected you "can feel it in the air."

There is no assignment. Just take part in the Discussion section and prepare for the final.

Special Consideration

Accommodations: Sections 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offer guidelines for curriculum and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center (287-7430). The student must present these recommendations to each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of the Drop/Add period.