



## From Criticism to a Practice of Inquiry

*Let's face it—many, if not most, humans are pretty good at criticizing and judging; even our best intentions can go by the wayside under the “right” circumstances. In addition, we all know that people believe more by our actions than by our words. So what's a teacher, a facilitator, a human to do?*

First of all, at least in the Western world, criticism has a long tradition of being valued; so we are normal if we find it at times challenging. Secondly, remembering we are all learners can help us to be gentle with ourselves, and others.

By adopting a stance and **practice of inquiry**, Dialogue Education™ practitioners:

- Invite more and richer dialogue
- Unearth and question assumptions that may not have been acknowledged
- Create an environment where learners are not afraid to say how they feel
- Invite questions and questioning
- Model respectful communication
- Chip away at tendencies to criticize or judge our selves, and others.

Here are some tips and tools to continue to grow your practice, and participants' **practice of inquiry**:

### Dialogue by Design

How do you dialogue with yourself? Consider that, if we shut ourselves or learners down by ignoring, criticizing or shaming, we STOP dialogue, or in other words, the ability to understand more thoroughly and thoughtfully. Your willingness to change (learn) is a model, provides examples (stories) and prepares you to be more authentic as a teacher.



**[30 Ways to Affirm.](#)**

## Upcoming Events

### Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach

*An Introduction to Dialogue Education™*

**June 8-11, 2010 ~ Raleigh, NC**

with Karen Ridout

([karen@globalearning.com](mailto:karen@globalearning.com))

[register now](#)

**August 10-13, 2010 ~ Boston, MA**

with Marian Darlington Hope

**Early Bird deadline: June 15**

([marian@globalearning.com](mailto:marian@globalearning.com))

[register now](#)

**September 14-17, 2010 ~ San Diego, CA**

with Karen Ridout

**Early Bird deadline: July 20**

([karen@globalearning.com](mailto:karen@globalearning.com))

[register now](#)

**October 19-22, 2010 ~ Montpelier, VT**

with Peter Perkins

**Early Bird deadline: August 24**

([peterp@globalearning.com](mailto:peterp@globalearning.com))

[register now](#)

**November 2-5, 2010 ~ Toronto, ON**

with Jeanette Romkema

**Early Bird deadline: September 7**

([jeanette@globalearning.com](mailto:jeanette@globalearning.com))

[register now](#)

**November 30-December 3, 2010 ~  
Raleigh, NC**

with Karen Ridout

**Early Bird deadline: October 5**

([karen@globalearning.com](mailto:karen@globalearning.com))

[register now](#)



### Preparation

Work with a trusted peer to learn more about your own positions, as you also conduct a Learning Needs and Resources Assessment to learn about others (learners, stakeholders). As you prepare to teach a topic, or with a group, where you know you have biases, be even more diligent about preparing questions ahead of time. Create open questions where there are no wrong answers; use this tip sheet for ideas.



Tip Sheet: [\*\*\*There's no Wrong Answer & a LOT to Learn\*\*\*](#)

### Question Your Assumptions

What is it that makes you feel and think you know what is best, or “right” about this topic, for this group, or for the group the participants will be working with when they leave? Be gentle, and be courageous in your inquiry.

### Create Learning Tasks that Elicit and Question Assumptions

No matter what the topic, there are ways to elicit the connections the learner might have either directly or indirectly with it, AND, what some of the underlying assumptions he/she may have about that topic or situation. The second part of the Tip Sheet introduced above, [\*\*\*There's No Wrong Answer & a LOT to Learn\*\*\*](#), offers starting points for developing learning tasks that invite reflection upon why someone thinks or feels the way they do.

### Level the Playing Field

One description of “leveling the playing field” is an action that helps groups of people find and acknowledge their commonalities and differences around particular topics. Many learning tasks can be designed to “level the playing field” within the group, so that there is a greater safety and greater opportunity for learning amongst the group.

The following Tip Sheet offers some example actions that could be found within learning tasks:



[\*\*\*Example Actions for Leveling the Playing Field\*\*\*](#)

### Advanced Learning Design

November 8-10, 2010 ~ Montpelier, VT  
with Peter Perkins

[\(peterp@globalearning.com\)](mailto:peterp@globalearning.com)

**Early Bird deadline: September 13**

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### Learning Evaluation by Design

December 7-8, 2010 ~ Washington, DC  
with Valerie Uccellani

[\(valerie@globalearning.com\)](mailto:valerie@globalearning.com)

**Early Bird deadline: October 12**

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View the complete

[\*\*2010 Public Course Calendar\*\*](#)



## **30 Ways to Affirm**

<b>Something other than great or good!</b>	<b>Affirmation even when I strongly disagree.</b>	<b>The response is incorrect, help!?</b>
Thanks!	"Thank you, Steve, you've pointed out something very important."	Hmmm, tell me how you got to that?
I like that idea because...		
Echo what has been said, for instance: "Respect- yes!"	"That's something I had not thought of before."	Tell me more about that, I had been thinking of this differently.
That is so interesting. Please tell me more.	I appreciate you sharing this idea because...	I'm not sure I know what you mean by that, can you say more.
So now we have (name...) Or Repeating the main points of the contribution (echoing)	I'm glad you shared that because I struggle with...	I've never thought of it that way—and I'm not sure I understand your thinking—tell me more.
Yes! Wow! Keep them coming!	Thanks for sharing this. It's good (important) to have some different perspectives about this.	I'm not sure we are talking about the same thing here. Let's have a look at it again...
That's a nice addition to what we are talking about.	One of the axioms of Dialogue Education is to "pray for doubt", thank you for doubting!	You know, that doesn't fit my experience. Can you tell me more about how you see that working?
3 claps, 3 stomps, fist pump, YES!	I hear/see/feel what you are saying. How does that relate to what we said earlier ... (weaving)	Let me check my understanding, did I hear you say ... ? (paraphrase)
Yes, this supports exactly what we are saying about...	I've never thought of it that way—tell me more!	What do others think of this idea? (throw it to the group)
I really like what you said about ...	OK! Ummmm. Let's explore that more!	Ummmm. Let's explore that more!
"POWER!!!" [clap]	How provocative. I'm not clear about.... Please tell me more.	How provocative. I'm not clear about.... Please tell me more.



## There's No Wrong Answer & a LOT to Learn

**OUR LEARNING:** When we ask in these ways (and more) there is only learning how another thinks, feels, or sees issues, content, topics, etc.

- In your experience, \_\_\_\_\_?
- How does this \_\_\_\_\_ affect your \_\_\_\_\_?
- In your work group, how might \_\_\_\_\_ be accepted?
- What reaction might your family have to \_\_\_\_\_? What is it that makes you think that?
- How useful have you found \_\_\_\_\_?
- When you look at \_\_\_\_\_, what ideas come up for you?

**RICH RESPONSES:** When we invite rich responses, learners and instructors gain greater insights into his/her own thinking and how this compares to the variety of ways to “understand” or feel, believe, or consider specific issues or topics.

- Share a time when \_\_\_\_\_. What had the greatest effect on your \_\_\_\_\_?
- What stands out to you as most important from this reading (presentation, dialogue, film clip, etc.)? What made you choose that?
- What excites you about “x”? What concerns do you have?
- Take a look at this \_\_\_\_\_. What would you add, change or question? Share the reasons you are making this suggestion.
- How would you rate your \_\_\_\_\_? (Examples: ...ease with saying “no”? ...comfort using “y”? ...appreciation for “z”?) What made you select that rating?



## ***Example Actions for Leveling the Playing Field***

The following portions of Learning Tasks are supported by the creation and maintenance of a safe and respectful learning environment, and represent only one of many principles and practices that need to be attended to. (See Chapters 2 & 3 in [Taking Learning to Task: Creative Strategies for Educating Adults](#) by Jane Vella; Jossey Bass 2000, for a complete description and examples of Learning Tasks).

### **Topic: Learners as Subjects**

**Find** a new partner. **Reflect** on your own consulting, training, teaching, and supervising. **Interview** each other, asking these questions.

1. *In what ways are your learners treated as “subjects”? How are they being invited to:*
  - *make decisions*
  - *critically analyze the content being taught*
  - *invited to apply the new ideas immediately to their own life or work*
2. *What actions or strategies do you use that help learners to develop their skills and confidence? How do you see these connecting to being a subject?*
3. *What is one more thing you can do to provide learners even more decision-making opportunities in your teaching situation?*

**Jot down** a few responses to each question in the space below. We will explore the Subject/Object idea more deeply as a whole group.



The tools and resources in this issue of *DE Tips & Tools* were developed/compiled by [Darlene Goetzman](#), Certified Dialogue Education Teacher and GLP Partner. [Darlene](#) will be teaching *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* again in 2011, or [contact her](#) to bring Dialogue Education™ directly to your company or organization.