Learning-Centered, Learner-Centered, Teacher-Centered... What's the Difference?

From the Back Porch
by Jane Vella
The Moment Of Recognition

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The Importance of Language and Culture Learning ~ by Debbie Witherow
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What’s New?

Please join us in welcoming Paula Berardinelli, our new Chief of Operations!

In collaboration with our seven partners and our staff, Paula will provide vision, leadership and management to move Global Learning Partners, Inc. to the next phase of development. Paula is a long-time friend of GLP and practitioner of Dialogue Education™, having studied with Jane Vella in the early 1990s and co-authored How Do They Know They Know? with Jane and Jim Burrow. Her extensive experience in business management is impressive. We are excited that she is with us as we begin this new era of GLP’s progress.

Welcome, Paula!

Karen Ridout, Chair, Board of Directors
On behalf of the Partners and Staff of GLP

Greetings! It is an honor and a privilege for me to join the Global Learning Partners team on July 1st as the Chief of Operations. My background represents a tapestry woven with threads from Dialogue Education™, consulting, training, new business creation, software development, and teaching with technology. As the COO, I am responsible for creating and ensuring that you, our colleagues, customers, clients, and advisors have a seamless and delightful experience engaging the expertise, services, and resources of Global Learning Partners. I welcome your partnership and collaboration!

Virtually yours,
Paula Berardinelli, Ed. D.
Chief of Operations
paula@globalearningpartners.com

GLP also welcomes... New Certified Dialogue Education™ Teachers (CDETs) Clayton Rowe and Rika VanderLaan, and Certified Dialogue Education™ Practitioner J. Mark Bowers. Watch for their bios and complete contact information to be added to our web site in the very near future: www.globalearning.com/team.htm.
We hope you’ve already had a chance to check out the newest addition to our repertoire of Dialogue Education™ tools and resources – Speaking of Dialogue, the Dialogue Education™ blog. We’re just getting started, but will be adding new content and resources on a weekly basis. We hope you’re finding the articles thought-provoking and that you’ll find inspiration in the real-life examples, sample designs, free tools and resources, and with your participation, stimulating discussion among practitioners.

The blog currently features three authors: Darlene Goetzman, Certified Dialogue Education™ Teacher and GLP Partner; Joan Dempsey, GLP Programs Manager, and Jane Vella, GLP founder and Partner Emeritus. Watch for additional authors and guest contributors to post from time to time as well.

If you haven’t checked it out yet, please visit soon! Don’t forget to subscribe via email or RSS so you don’t miss anything. And be sure to contribute your feedback and experiences using the comment link at the end of each article - join the dialogue!

More Ways to Connect

More Resources...

- **Dialogue Education™ Tips & Tools** - a monthly e-publication that addresses a different topic (or challenge) in each issue, and offers a variety of links, tools and other resources for Dialogue Education™ practitioners. [View past issues](#). [Subscribe](#).

- **Quotes & Questions** – a weekly e-publication designed to Inspire, Provoke and Support, by encouraging reflection on issues related to teaching and learning. Combining a single quotation
or question with beautiful nature photography, this resource can also be downloaded in postcard format. Or, as one reader suggests:

I don’t have a favorite quote to share but I did want to say that I LOVE receiving these Quotes and Questions. Every time I get a new one, I make it my computer desktop background – and I read the quote every morning when I start my computer. I think it is a great way to start the day – and helps me keep dialogue education principles in mind in my work. Thank you so much for doing this.

Have a great day!
Maryann 😊

Maryann K. Miernicki, RD, CLE
Nutrition Education Coordinator
American Red Cross WIC Program

If you’re not already receiving Dialogue Education Tips & Tools, or Quotes & Questions, why not take a moment to check them out?

**Interesting Links**

1. Teacher-centered vs. Learner-centered paradigms -
   http://www.assessment.uconn.edu/docs/TeacherCenteredVsLearnerCenteredParadigms.pdf

2. Teacher vs. Learner-Centered Instruction -
   http://www.nclrc.org/essentials/goalsmethods/learncentpop.html

3. The Learning-Centered Classroom: An Overview -
   http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/ctl/fellows/0506overview.htm

4. Creating a Syllabus for the Learner-Centered Classroom -
   http://tep.uoregon.edu/workshops/teachertraining/learnercentered/syllabus/textdocs/lc_syllabus.pdf

5. A list of resources, mostly by Phyllis Blumberg, on Learner-Centered Teaching -
   http://www.usp.edu/teaching/Learner-Centered/

6. Learner Centered Course Goals -
   http://www.4faculty.org/includes/digdeeper/lc_coursegoals.htm

**Revolutionize Your Learning! Transform Your World.**
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I am deeply moved by the book I am reading on my back porch - *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama* by David Remnick. When Barack Obama was campaigning in South Carolina in 2007 he heard a story about one of his young campaign workers in that state, Ashley Baia. She had reached a reluctant, older black man who came to a caucus. When the man was asked “Why are you supporting Obama?” he responded, “Because of Ashley”.

Barack called this **the moment of recognition**. A young white campaign worker met and touched an old South Carolina retired gentleman. Thus, is history made.

Who touched you in terms of how you teach and design learning? Whom would you name if someone asked: “Why are you doing the hard work that is involved in Dialogue Education™?”

I would love to hear those stories, and so will the new Chief Operating Officer of Global Learning Partners, Inc! Please send me these stories ([jane@globalearning.com](mailto:jane@globalearning.com)) and I will ensure that he or she reads them.

My story is fantastic. I was a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam in the early seventies, teaching teachers at the Institute of Education. I was deeply frustrated by the colonial system of university education that prevailed there, and was seriously considering a career change. Coach tennis? Sell shoes? Anything!

*Grace a Dieu,* I met and worked briefly with Paulo Freire, who was visiting Tanzania from his home in Geneva, Switzerland. Hope was born anew in my failing heart. Education could be dialogue, a system as he put it, “to create a world in which it is easier to love.” My moment of recognition was because of Paulo.

Friends, no matter what we call this system, or how we describe it, the name begins with a capital G, for *Gift.*
A book review by Paul D. Nitz: For theological educators interested in dialogical method


For any theological educator interested in the reasoning behind Dialogue Education™, Reuel Howe’s little book, The Miracle of Dialogue, may be of interest.

Howe’s argument is that theological education which is “monological” (later labeled “banking” by Freire) is dictatorial and ineffective.

The purpose of communication is not to give our answer to people’s questions... When a question is put to an authority, he often answers what is being asked instead of using his knowledge, understanding, and skill to help his inquirers move in the direction of finding answers to their own questions... He has not discovered the greater excitement and satisfaction of having learners experience for themselves, with guidance, of course, the joy of acquiring insight and knowledge. Because teachers so often rush to give their own answers and opinions to questions, instead of using their resources to help others learn, much that passes for education weakens the student rather than strengthens him, and makes him more dependent rather than more resourceful. This has been the effect of much theological education and candidates for the ministry during their training period. Pg 52

He would even go so far as to label monological relationships as selfish and evil.

Education, relationships, love, and communication that are not dialogical are evil because they exploit and seek to appropriate. Much of education and communication, to say nothing of love and relationship, are evil and destructive. Pg 39

Instead, he identifies selflessness as the basis for different approach: dialogical thinking and teaching.

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The principle underlying dialogue is: ‘He who loses his life for my sake and the Gospel shall find it.’ This means that we enter into relationship not for the purpose of gaining, but for the purpose of giving, with the prayer that we may lose our pretentions, our defensive need to justify ourselves...” Pg 97

One particularly interesting thread in the book is Howe’s treatment of the misperception that teaching dialogically means giving up absolute truth.

This book gives no specific guidance on methods, instead affirming that any method can be made more dialogical and the most participatory method can be manipulated to “monological” ends. Instead, he lays out the principles which a “dialogical thinker” (teacher) should follow to enjoy the miracle of dialogue in a classroom.

Paul D. Nitz (pnitz@wels.net) has been using dialogue in the classroom, for major meetings, and for seminars over the past four years. A graduate of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, he currently teaches and is Principal at Lutheran Bible Institute in Lilongwe, Malawi. He has lived in Malawi for sixteen years with his wife, Susan.

Reflections

Nothing earth shattering here, just something that made me smile. I've been working on a design for health care professionals that has me a bit intimidated, especially due to the brief time frame I have been given to accomplish miracles! I've been at it all day and suddenly came up with a way of describing what happens in the ongoing struggle to not have “too much WHAT (content) for the WHEN (time)”. I'm experiencing CONTENT CREEP!! I've had to stand up a few times, go outside and walk, take deep breaths, and recover. Does this ever get any easier?! This reminds me of one of my favorite anonymous quotes. "Stop wishing things were easier. Start wishing you were better."

~Joye Norris, Dialogue Education™ practitioner (docjn@aol.com)
Learning By Dialogue, North Myrtle Beach, SC
Dialogue Events: How Dialogue Education™ Can Transform “Star-Centered” into “Participant-Centered” Celebrations

Joan Dempsey, GLP Programs Manager (joan@globalearning.com) is also a writer of literary fiction and serves as president of the board of trustees of the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance, where she applies the principles & practices of Dialogue Education™ on a regular basis at events, meetings, and gatherings of writers.

A month ago I attended a literary arts celebration, the kick-off evening event for a weekend of literary festivities. The auditorium was packed, the crowd attentive, and an anticipatory buzz circulated through the room as we waited for the world-renowned novelist to take the stage. She did. By the time she left the podium the brightly lit auditorium was full of nodding heads. Nodding not in agreement but in a futile attempt to keep sleeping heads upright. Those who weren’t dozing were rereading their programs or furtively checking their Blackberries or whispering to their neighbors. One woman was reading another author’s book.

Fast-forward to a month later, another literary evening event in the same community, a celebration to honor winners of the Maine Literary Awards, which each year celebrates Maine authors and publishers who submit their work for consideration. In my role as President of the Board of Trustees for the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance, which gives the awards and hosts the celebration, my goal for the evening was to make each winner (and honorable mention) feel special and celebrated and to give the whole crowd a feeling of connection to each other and to the larger Maine literary community.

In order to accomplish this (and to avoid the nodding heads from a month earlier!) I took a Dialogue Education™ approach to the evening: I made the event participant-centered rather than “star”-centered and what a night it turned out to be!

Dialogue Education™, you see, isn’t only for the classroom or the training center or the Board Room. It can be applied to any and all life experiences, and what a difference it makes!
Here are some of the highlights of how the principles & practices of Dialogue Education™ were at work in the room:

- **Expectations** – In all the advance publicity and invitations for the event I made certain that potential attendees knew exactly what to expect from the evening, not only the basic agenda but how they might feel by attending and who else might be there so they could envision themselves in the room and feel comfortable buying tickets;

- **Congruence** – I made certain that what they expected actually took place;

- **Inclusion** – In order for the event to be participant-centered I took measures to make sure everyone felt included:
  1. all winners and honorable mentions had extensive contact with me prior to the event so by the time they arrived we were old friends;
  2. all attendees also had contact with me prior to the event;
  3. the entire Board of Trustees was briefed in advance on who would be attending and they acted as ambassadors during the reception;
  4. everyone was greeted at the door and provided with highly visible name tags;

- **Engagement (& Relevance)** – The audience was actively engaged twice during the ceremony, once in a sharing on a relevant topic with the folks they were seated next to and again during an in-ceremony door prize contest for a basket of the winning books;

- **PowerPoint (& Relevance)** – As each winner read a brief passage from the podium, I had behind them on a big screen a projected image of their name, winning title, and a photograph or graphic that represented the piece from which they were reading.

Highlights for me that indicated success included:

- sold-out audience;
- the huge BUZZ in the room when the audience was involved;
- the abundant laughter and ease of the audience;
- the circulation amongst the crowd (never saw anyone who wasn’t attended to);
- people’s reluctance to leave when the event came to an end;
- almost without exception every single participant made a point to seek me out and thank me for a great evening;
- the e-mails of thanks are still coming in a full week later.

Mission accomplished: “Dialogue Events” at work!
Finding the Sweet Spot: Creating Learning-Centered Workshops

Dwayne Hodgson (dwayne.hodgson@yahoo.ca / twitter: learningcycle) is the Manager of Sustainability Learning Programs at The Natural Step Canada. He also blogs about learning design and facilitation at www.learningcycle.ca.

The question about what the centre of learning should be – either the teacher, the learner, or learning itself – seems like an easy one for people immersed in Dialogue Education™ or other similar approaches to adult learning. Indeed, the topic for this summer’s Voices in Dialogue e-journal initially struck me as a closed, (even rhetorical) question, with a “right” answer. (For shame, Jeanette!).

But as I swing in the front porch hammock and listen to my children playing on the street, I think back to when I played tennis as a kid and I discovered how the middle of a tennis racket is the best place to hit the ball. It’s called the “sweet spot”, that place smack dab in the centre of the cat gut where the tension is juuuust right. When you hit the ball there, your shot is powerful and the ball goes right where you want it to. But hit it anywhere else – on the rim, the yoke, the outer strings or the shaft – and there’s no telling where the ball will go.

Similarly, finding the learning-centred “sweet spot” in a learning event involves negotiating the dynamic tension between the competing demands of the learners, ourselves as teachers/facilitators and the sponsors of a learning event. But when you hit it, you really experience the power of learning!

Four Different Kinds of Learning Events

Let me continue by describing four types of learning events (e.g. workshops, classes, seminars, online-learning, conferences, etc.).

1) Learner-Centred Events

Learner-Centred events typically celebrate the knowledge, experience and decision-making of the participants.

In the hands of a skilled facilitator, these events are highly-responsive to their emerging
learning-needs, providing space the participants to set the learning objectives, agenda and process on the fly (e.g. the Training for Transformation approach). In other cases, such as in Open Space Technology workshops, the learners actually choose the topics to discuss in self-facilitated small groups, thus allowing them to truly be Subjects (Decision Makers) in a highly Relevant and Immediate learning experience.

Done poorly, however, completely learner-centered events can risk becoming haphazard, unaccountable and time-wasting events. I’ve attended workshops in which the facilitators are hesitant to add in their knowledge and experience (e.g. “I’m just the facilitator, I don’t know anything....”), or even to exercise decisive voice on creating an solid learning process (e.g. “what happens is what is meant to happen”). As a result we spent a lot of time sharing our collective ignorance or getting stuck in a poorly-structured learning task. In other cases, I’ve seen facilitators demonstrate a complete lack of accountability to meeting the agreed upon agenda by suddenly changing the program to meet the needs of a few outspoken participants. In both cases, the end result was frustration and disengagement.

2) Teacher-Centred Learning

On the other extreme, we have learning that is Teacher-Centered. These types of learning events often exemplify a monologue approach to learning, where “one voice” – the teacher’s – dominates and is valued.

In its worst form, we see teacher-centered learning in professional conferences, academic lectures, and religious services in which one expert “delivers” information to his/her “target audience” via the heavy artillery of lectures, sermons and data-dense PowerPoint slides. The learner’s role here is largely passive; their role here is reduced to nodding in agreement – or nodding off to sleep – and they may (or not) get a chance to ask a question of clarification to the speaker at the end.

In its best case, Teacher-Centred learning events can be a great keynote with tones of inspirational stories, some clever jokes, a few super slides, some witty repartee with a few audience members, and a compelling call to action that has us all on our feet at the end. (See www.ted.com for some effective presentations).

But even here, the focus remains primarily on the personality, charisma, knowledge and/or style of the presenter -- “Wow! She sure knew a lot” or “What an engaging speaker he was” – rather than on what the learners did or learned.
Of course, I’d rather listen to a presenter who was personable and knowledgeable; and there are still orators out there like President Obama or former UN HIV/AIDS ombudsman, Stephen Lewis, who can share their wisdom and stir our hearts. But in the end, without providing opportunities for the learners to go deeper to create their own meaning, it is difficult to discern how much the audience members retain or what difference it makes for their lives.

3) Sponsor-Centred Learning Events

I’d like to add a third component here: the sponsor. When working as a consultant, I’ve also found the sponsor can have an inordinate effect on the learning process. Often the person or organization who hires you to design and facilitate a learning event has their own agenda and requirements, and you find yourself needing to balance these versus what you want to accomplish and what the learners are requesting. The fact that they are also paying you also introduces a power dynamic here that makes it extra tricky!

I once facilitated a workshop in which the sponsoring agency provided a staff member to attend each session of the workshop. “Great!” I thought, “They can be there to answer any technical questions and they’ll also get a more realistic sense of the challenges that the participants face in meeting their proposal and reporting requirements”.

But in practice, I realized that they were really there to ensure adherence to the donor’s understanding of the topic as articulated in the government-approved slide deck. Any challenge
to the received orthodoxy or deviation from the officially-sanctioned slides was met with a hasty correction during the workshop and a scathing rebuke to me during the end-of-the-day debrief. It felt a bit like having a Politburo representative there to ensure ideological purity and adherence to the Party’s line.

4) Learning-Centered Learning Events

Somewhere in the elusive middle, however, is a place where the needs of the learners and the teacher are balanced, where both are equals and co-learners, but they have distinct and clear roles. *The Sweet Spot*. When you hit it, it looks something like this:

- Before the workshop, the facilitator invites the learners to name what they want to learn and what they bring via a Learning Needs and Resources Assessment (LNRA).

- She then looks at the WHO (participants, facilitators, sponsors), is “wise about their Why’s” and creates a structured yet flexible learning design with clearly defined Achievement-Based Objectives (ABOs).

- This workshop design balances the needs of everyone in the room and finds ways to meet the emerging learning needs without compromising the ABOs that everyone has agreed to.

- There is a mix of inductive tasks that draw upon the prior experience, knowledge and wisdom of the learners and deductive tasks in which new theories, knowledge and facts are mixed in. The learners are given plenty of time to apply what they’ve learned and to consider the significance of their learning for the future.

- Everyone’s voices are heard and affirmed; the facilitator’s role is clearly defined to keep the time, guide the process and be responsive to the emerging learning needs.

- The facilitator uses the design flexibly, bending it when she needs to, stretching a task here, cutting another back there, bending it like a trellis to support a growing vine.

- Throughout the workshop, the learners are invited to step back and reflect meta-critically on their own learning and to actively engage in the evaluation process for their own sake.

The end effect is that the design and facilitation approach together create a space in the middle of a circle of the learners and facilitator. A space in which learning can occur freely. A place of surprise, creativity and wonder balanced by accountability, clear roles and enough structure. I’ve seen this happen a few times in my own workshops – although of course, fewer times than
I’d like-- and when it happens, it’s magical.

A Musical Analogy
Just in case tennis isn’t working for you, how about a musical analogy:

**Teacher-Centred Learning Events** = A solo by a great trumpeter or opera singer. If they are good, we are in awe of their virtuosity and listen with rapt attention. But no one in the audience dares to make a peep.

**Learner-Centred Learning Events** = A free jazz ensemble in which the players know their parts, and improvise freely. Although chaotic, there can be great creativity on display and it’s full of surprises. Or, depending on your tastes, it can just sound like a lot of noise....

**Sponsor-Centred Learning Events** = The Soviet State Orchestra plays a symphonic work by an approved, ideologically-approved composer in perfect unity. Technically flawless and controlled, but no space for spontaneity or humanity.

**Learning-Centred Learning Events** = A jazz orchestra in which the facilitator conducts an agreed-upon score, keeps the time, and cues the soloists (sometimes extending the solos if they are really hot!). He strives to create space for the soloists to shine while honouring the role of all the players.

Epilogue: Fighting the Teacher Within

One of the traps that I think that I sometimes fall into is to think that my learning events are automatically “learning-centred” because I use a Dialogue Education™ approach.

But I must confess that my design-centric approach can sometimes become as “teacher-centred” as the worst lecture or death-by-PowerPoint presentation. I have to continually fight the temptation to over-structure the learning process, or to stick too rigidly to my learning design in the face of an emerging learning need or time-management issue. I need to cultivate the practice of leaving lots of “white space” in the design and to adapt to the flow of the learning process on the floor.

After all, it’s not about my design, it’s about learning.
Mourning “The Death of the Professor”

by Thoko Madonko, Trainer/Technical Assistance Provider for International Budget Partnership (IBP) – South Africa
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A Brave New World

My introduction to Dialogue Education™ took place at “a beautiful location at the Historic Inns of Annapolis...We expect a room large enough for both a circle of chairs, working tables, and plenty of wall space,” as the facilitator Peter Noteboom phrased it. Little did I know that this historic setting would be the backdrop for a tragedy – the death of my teaching practice as I knew it. Don’t get me wrong: I am thankful the fatal outcome took place in such a beautiful setting. Nonetheless, it was and continues to be a tough process and, sometimes, as I sit down to write out my Learning Needs and Resources Assessment (LNRA), I catch myself mourning the “old professor”. ¹

Teacher-Centered

What am I mourning? I have had many opportunities to practice teaching and facilitating in varied settings - from the large lecture theatre of the University to the intimate breakout room with community-based activists. However, back then it was primarily about me – “the professor” transferring knowledge to the “students”. This was how I was taught (at least how I think I was taught). I felt proud to be able to stand up with the help of the trusty ever-reliant PowerPoint and hold forth on the topic at hand. Yet if I were to reflect and be really honest with myself, I would have to ask: Stand up and hold forth, but to what end? For my first lesson in Annapolis, the seven steps of design might help to answer this question.
WHO: Me, Teacher: Them, Students

WHY: To get MY information across TO said students. I have the knowledge to provide to them that they, by virtue of being there, must want and not know.

WHEN: During the teaching session

WHERE: The lecture theatre or breakout room.

THE CONTENT: As the students engage with the content it is the student’s responsibility to pre-read, listen quietly, ask probing questions centered on me and the content area and then to upload the information and to have LEARNT it. In other words, know the knowledge I have transferred to them.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: They come to the sessions and write the test or reply “correctly” to the questions I pose in the session.

To answer the question of this edition of *Voices in Dialogue* my time in Annapolis brought to light how my previous pedagogical approach was both limited and limiting. I became aware that there is a difference between having a learner- and learning-centered approach than merely a teacher-centered focus.

Learner-Centered

In my current position as trainer at the International Budget Partnership I have the opportunity to work with incredibly brave and dedicated people from across the globe interested in making a real difference in the lives of those most affected by government decision-making. My previous approach limited the creativity I could bring to my design, teaching, facilitation and evaluation.

The International Budget Partnership collaborates with civil society around the world to analyze and influence public budgets in order to reduce poverty and improve the quality of governance.
Having been shown some of the key aspects to Dialogue Education™, it has since helped, and continues to help, put an end to my monologue and open up space for dialogue. This has been no easy task. It takes me out of that warm comfort zone behind the lectern in which I feel I am the one with the knowledge, to a space where the focus is on the learner and what it is they bring to the content – making it truly Learner-Centered. For me to be learner-centered requires a full cycle of learning based on trust and accountability but most of all humility sprinkled with quite a bit of humor. So where have the changes occurred? See below:

**WHO:** 20 leaders from various organizations around the world undertaking Health and Budget Advocacy in a variety of settings. A team of trainers and facilitators from the International Budget Partnership that bring with them extensive experience working with groups around the world focusing on budget advocacy.

**WHY:** Growing interest by civil society organizations who want to deepen and sharpen their knowledge and skills in the area of Health and Budget Advocacy.

**WHEN:** The workshop consists of an intensive ten-day learning experience and helps participants embarking on a health and budgets project to develop substantial practical competence in health and budget advocacy work. After the workshop, support will be provided through mentorship and technical assistance so as to enhance the impact of their health projects.

**WHERE:** This extends beyond the training venue to the exchange of information via emails and follow-up either by onsite or offsite mentorship and technical assistance.
THE CONTENT: To build the capacity of civil society organizations in terms of research, analysis and advocacy to improve health allocations and expenditure; to develop an understanding of how these skill shave an impact on issues such as transparency, accountability, citizen participation and poverty; to highlight the importance of strategic collaborations between different kinds of institutions and organizations that promote public health.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: Using evaluation and monitoring methods that consider the above aims of the learning event as well as providing the learners with the opportunity to express meaningfully their experience of the learning event.

Learning-Centered

My answer to the question “what’s the difference?” is not to be\(^2\):

- Silent – “Silence offers both learners and teachers the occasion for exploration... silence offers opportunity for quiet reflection on new concepts, the implications of newly tried skills, and the challenge of new attitudes.” I have found that waiting and allowing for silence has made a dramatic impact in the way I see and interact with the participants I am working with. Through careful design, the learning event becomes more open to a mutual flow of information and learning.

- Humble – “The truth is, it is not easy for anyone to give up the mantle of power as the ‘professor’...they must apply new knowledge, skills and attitudes for themselves in their own way”. In this way the learning event is truly a two-way process. Again, it places me in the fortunate position of being able to center the learning while learning to center. Circular I know but it is hard to explain it otherwise. Sitting down to revise materials is no longer about my ego but about how I have learnt from the ways in which the materials did and did not work, and how they contributed to the participants’ learning. This is far more exciting and
again pushes you to consider the learner and the learning at the centre of your design, teaching and facilitating.

- Prepared to ask Open Questions – “The open question is the most effective means of inviting dialogue. An open question is one that does not have a predetermined response. An open question invites critical reflection, analysis, review and personal perceptions”. Although one of the toughest changes in my practice, the asking of open questions no longer places me at the centre but allows for an exchange of information and, again, allows for learning to be placed at the center.

A Brave New Teaching Practice – Learning as Purpose

In conclusion, while I still mourn for that safer (in other words easier) space where learners are “objects of the teacher’s power”, I am, and will continue to be, refreshed and energized by seeing both the learners and myself as “Subject” and as “decision-maker”. This difference allows for greater creativity in the work that I do and in many ways assists me in assuring that I am providing a space for learning to be the purpose.

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1 Inspired by an article by Jane Vella “Learning, Transfer and Impact”, Voices in Dialogue, Fall 2008.
2 The quotes below have been taken from my rolodex – Humility, Silence and Open Questions Card, Global Learning Partners 2008.
3 Inspired by an article by Jane Vella “Learning, Transfer and Impact” Voices in Dialogue Fall 2008.
Bringing the Sacred into Learning

by Marshall Yoder (paul.m.yoder@emu.edu) and Jeanette Romkema (jeanette@globalearning.com), instructors at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute, Eastern Mennonite University.

This spring we had the honor of teaching the course Designing Learner-Centered Training for Conflict Transformation at the Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI) at Eastern Mennonite University located in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Each year the students gather from around the world, the courses are cutting edge and provocative, and the professors are leaders and activists in the area of peacebuilding, restorative justice and conflict transformation. Most of our students are active practitioners in these areas and we were there to teach how to design learning events for their work and to consistently model learner-centered education (what we call Dialogue Education™).

One of the most moving aspects of this course for us and the learners was our use of metaphor. Every day we created the space for a 30-minute reflection using a tree as a metaphor to consider our journey as learners and teachers in the course. Excuse our boldness, but no teacher-centered classroom could have produced the depth of heart-felt reflection, introspection or sharing as this learner-centered approach allowed and invited with this task. Many days we ended our time in silence after each of us had an opportunity to share.

Here are the learning tasks for our 7-day course:
Day 1: Come Plant a Seed! (Task 7)

7A. Select a seed from the basket that will be passed around the circle and hold it in the palm of your hand.

7B. Reflect silently on the attributes of a seed, and then compare the seed to the learning process you experienced today.

7C. Interview your partner and ask each other the following questions.

- What new “seeds” have been planted in you today about learners and the learning process?

7D. You will be invited to come plant your seed. If you wish, you may choose to share a thought with the rest of the class.

Feel free to leave in silence when you wish after everyone is finished.

Day 2: Grounded (Task 17)

17A. Choose a partner with whom you feel comfortable. Stand face-to-face with your partner at arm’s length. One at a time and when you are ready, gently push each other with two hands on the shoulders. Describe the sensation and feeling of being pushed and losing your balance.

17B. Stand again in the same manner. Close your eyes and listen to the tree meditation. One at a time, again attempt to push each other at the top of the breast bone. Listen to the meditation again to become un-rooted.
17C. **Interview** your partner.

   a. How was the first experience similar or different from the second?
   b. What does it feel like to be grounded physically and how does it compare to be grounded in other ways?
   c. What roots do you think you need to strengthen to ground yourself with greater firmness as a dialogue practitioner?
   d. What are some of your core values that keep you grounded as you stretch to grow and learn? How do you think you, as a facilitator show respect for the core values that learners have in a classroom or workshop?

17D. **Write** those things that keep you grounded on the paper roots provided. If you wish, you may share some of your words as you **place** your roots around our large.

*Feel free to leave in silence when you wish after everyone is finished.*

**Day 3: Willow in the Wind** (Task 25)

25A. **Gather** in a circle. **Listen, observe, and practice** the instructions on how to be part of the forest and how to be a willow tree.

25B. **Re-gather** in groups of six to carry out the activity and **choose** a group leader.

25C. Still in the groups of six, **ask** each other the following questions:

   1) How did it feel to be part of the “forest”?
   2) How did it feel to be a “willow tree”?
   3) Who and what makes up the “forest” of your life?
   4) What insights have you today or this week that will strengthen your confidence in yourself or in others?

25D. **Write** your insights on a strip of paper bark and share what you wrote if you wish.

*Feel free to leave in silence when you wish after everyone is finished.*
Day 4: The Problem Tree (Task 33)

33A. Listen to the story about “the problem tree”.

33B. Identify some of the problems and challenges you are facing in the design process and write them down on the leaves provided.

33C. Describe the problems and challenge as you see them to your partner of three and brainstorm briefly together about some of the resources you might need to solve the problems or meet the challenges.

33D. As a sign of support in the midst of the challenges of design, your partner will tape your leaves to the class tree while briefly describing one of the problems or challenges you identified. You will tape your partner’s leaves to the tree and describe a problem or challenge.

Feel free to leave in silence when you wish after everyone is finished.
**Day 5: Flowers of Enjoyment (Task 40)**

40A. **Reflect** on those things you have most enjoyed during your time at SPI and in this class so far by asking yourself the following questions. Write key words down on the paper petals provided to remind you of what you have enjoyed.

1) What “flowers” have burst into bloom for you since you have been here?
2) What special things have happened that you would like to remember when you leave SPI?

40B. **Choose** a flower and a piece of tape. **Write** these special thinks on the petals of your flower.

40C. If you wish, **share** what you wrote as you are attaching it to our tree.

*Feel free to leave in silence when you wish after everyone is finished.*
Day 6: Beyond the Wrapping (Task 49)

49A. Choose a piece of fruit candy from the basket.

49B. On your own, dream about the fruits or results of the design you are now preparing and getting ready to try out. What do you think they will be like?

49D. Savor these fruits of your labour. If you wish, share your thoughts with the group as you attach your candy.

*Feel free to leave in silence when you wish after everyone is finished.*

Day 7: New Seeds! (Task 56)

Personal Reflection time

56A. As you look at our tree now, reflect on your learning for each day during this course. Recall when the seed of the class was planted, when the roots grew down deep, when the trunk of new friendships developed, when problems sprouted like leaves, when the enjoyable moments flowered, when you envisioned the fruits of your design...

56B. Name your feelings as this class comes to an end.

56C. Decide on a personal or professional commitment you would like to make as this class ends. You might, for example, commit to exploring new ways to use Dialogue Education™ in your work, to practicing a particular skill, or to respecting the different learning styles of your family members.
Group Reflection time

56D. The tree of our class has matured and is now dropping some of its seeds, readying itself to spread new life. **Brainstorm** what new things you think will grow out of the experiences in class and during SPI this session.

56E. **Select** another seed from the ones on the ground around our maturing tree. Through a circle process, those who wish to **voice** their personal or professional commitment to the class may do so.

56F. Anyone who wishes to take any parts of the tree with them to remind them of this commitment may do so.

*Feel free to leave in silence when you wish after everyone is finished.*

Of course there was a fair amount of preparation time for these tasks: bringing in a pot, sand, seeds, branches, candy; cutting paper roots, leaves, and flowers; as well as, making and protecting a circle of chairs around the tree. However, it was worth it! The tree put the “sacred” in learning, “beauty” in the classroom, and “mystery” in a group of learners. Learner-centered education creates the space for all this, where learning could be deeply personal, wonderfully surprising, and playfully moving. We left each day exhausted and amazed at what had gone on.

During our seven days with this remarkable group of learners, both of us were touched by everyone’s personal commitments to peace and the ways in which they each served as “teachers” for each other. The sights and sounds of learners from different countries, religions and cultures working in pairs to design their individual learning events was moving and inspiring. Despite these differences, a tree which grew from seed to mature growth and eventual renewal, helped to unite us all at the end of each day. And, we all left with real seeds to symbolize our commitment to using our newly-discovered tools in their work, relationships and life.

*[NOTE: The metaphor described above was originally created by Elena Huegel at Centro Shalem, who co-taught the course with Robb Davis at the Summer Peacebuilding Program (SPI) in 2005. She felt that the course needed a deeply “affective thread” that could more tightly weave the learners to each other, their learning and their journey in the class. She was right and we are grateful for her wisdom each time this course is taught. Since then she has incorporated this metaphor and the corresponding activities into her a learner-centered manual for environmental education teachers called “Estrategias Innovadoras para la Educación Ambiental” (in English: “Innovative Strategies for Environmental Education”) to be used by the Centro Shalom in Chile in conjunction with the Universidad Católica del Maule (October 2005). She co-wrote this manual with Carol Verdugo.]*
A Tapestry of Approaches

by Casey Boyle-Eldridge, Irasburg, VT
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The moment I read the theme for the summer 2010 issue of Voices in Dialogue: “Learning-Centered, Learner-Centered, Teacher-Centered... What’s the Difference?” I thought of my experience in Eagle Pass, Texas last June. The training I facilitated there was a tapestry of these three approaches to pedagogy. This day highlighted the differences, yet demonstrated the need for, all three approaches in my training design. The common threads that weave throughout learning-centered, learner-centered, and teacher-centered designs provide opportunity to change the colors in the canvas as needed to achieve a learner-centered outcome.

In May of 2009, I received a call from a training agency in Texas. They had a request from a substance-abuse prevention coalition for training in strategic planning. The content to be covered was the framework of a federal initiative called the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF). This initiative is a prevention program that targets under age and binge drinking among 12 to 25 year olds. I was excited to have this opportunity to design a training that was learner-centered.

Trainings are generally requested when there is a need to explore and gain knowledge about some particular topic. This coalition was required to receive training in the SPF framework as part of their funding requirements. The desired outcome of this training was to help the participants develop a strategic plan checklist in which the plan they would eventually develop would include the five steps of the SPF. My design of this workshop began from a traditionally teacher-centered approach in which I, the teacher, decided the content—the five steps of the framework. In order to achieve the pre-determined outcome I knew I had to move the design of the training away from being teacher-centered to learner-centered. The participants needed to be able to immediately apply the understanding of each of these five steps of the SPF framework into action steps that would create their strategic plan checklist. Thus a learning-centered environment was critical to the task.
A learning-centered environment is one in which participation is greater than lecture. It is an environment in which the learner determines what is to be taught. It is inquiry-based by their questions. I began setting the stage for a learning-centered environment by sharing the Achievement-Based-Objectives (ABOs) for the day. In addition, because I was not able to benefit from a Learning Needs and Resource Assessment (LNRA) of each participant’s needs, I felt it necessary to have some background information about the learners. I used a task in which each participant was asked to identify at least one hope or expectation for the day. This activity allowed me to use their responses to glean a little knowledge of how much they knew about the five steps of the SPF framework or at least what they thought this training was about.

We progressed through the day with an explanation of the key words that defined the five steps to the framework (teacher-centered). We then completed tasks in which the participants were able to apply the definition (learner-centered) directly to their evolving strategic plan. For instance, in small groups the task was presented to identify data sources that could be used for the first step of the framework: a community needs assessment. The participants soon came to realize that the tasks in and of themselves are the learning-centered environment in which they could explore how knowledgeable they were about their community and the community’s needs. They could see their strategic plan checklist come to life, a checklist that was immediate, relevant, and applicable.

This was a bi-lingual training in which an interpreter was required. The language challenge helped provide a good metaphor for speaking with teenagers. Just as we had to work to cross the language divide, so too do adults have to work to cross the generational divide with teenagers. This day was a win-win for everyone, as the participants became my teachers. I learned new words in a different language, and the group learned new definitions specific to a particular program. Our outcomes were met and the day was a great success. This success can be attributed to the how the practices and principles of Dialogue Education™ allow for fluidity and flexibility to weave a teacher-centered expectation by the group to a learner-centered outcome through a learning-centered design. I find that the teacher-centered approach is the starting point – the design of the training. The learning-centered approach is shown in the tasks that empower the participants to explore and discover the knowledge they already posses through praxis. Learner-centered education is the outcome - the personal empowerment toward their own individual decision-making in their overall strategic planning.
Labeling the Learning: Traditional versus Dialogue Education™

by Rev. Paul D. Nit (pnitz@wels.net), Principal - Lutheran Bible Institute, Lilongwe, Malawi

In her book “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain,” artist Betty Edwards writes about resisting the Left Brain tendency to "label" things. If I see a car and label it as "car," I will draw a representation of a car... really a pictograph. But if I see a thing defined only by itself and its appearance, then I will be flooded with details that only the un-speaking Right Brain can deal with. Then I will be well on the road to seeing shapes, shades, and angles and reflect that in my drawing. I need to see the car in a "different way." According to Betty Edwards, the taxing effort of this “seeing” is really a battle between the right and left sides of my brain.

This labeling concept came to mind when a fellow dialoguer complained, “I can’t exaggerate how difficult I am finding it to turn abstract, conceptual content into learning tasks. It’s possible, but sometimes my brain actually hurts as I try to make it see things in a different way.” It seems to me that this idea of labeling could be used to distinguish between traditional teaching methods and the Dialogue Education™ approach to learning. First, let’s clarify this idea of labeling as applied to education.

In the area of education, we could say that labels are simply shortcut terms to encapsulate and name what has been learned. This could be an abstract term (constructivism, relativity) or a title which sums up a number of things (Dialogue Education™, laws of physics). As I learn a body of knowledge, I need to label it so that I can then build on it. When I have understood and labeled Speed and Mass, only then can I deal with Velocity and Acceleration.

Labeling can be taken too far, especially in higher education. I once volunteered to read a friend’s doctoral thesis. After ten pages, I decided I would have to renege on my promise. The paper was so full of abstract esoteric polysyllabic terms that it would have taken me a month to...
unpack. I get frustrated when labels for concepts have been taken to an altitude at which my brain does not function. At that level, I think labels have gone too far and confound learning for most. Probably a more common problem with labeling is when it is done poorly.

Labeling is only a good and essential step in learning when it flows from a good grasp of the concept. When a label is prematurely attached to a concept that students do not understand well, it shows. We have all had students who can name a concept and define it, but clearly don’t understand it. We see it in their comments, or questions, or on a written test. They match the terms and definitions perfectly while answers to the essay portion of the test leave us wondering if we need to find a new profession.

But when students take chunks of knowledge, label it, and use those labels in a way that shows they’ve really understood, we are exhilarated. Progress has been made. Learning has happened. And now, the students can build on those labels and their web of knowledge can expand.

If learning is meaningful “labeling,” what method works best? How does Dialogue Education™ rate in comparison to Traditional teaching methods? Which one better leads the student to understand concepts or a body of knowledge and put a meaningful label on it?

It seems to me that Traditional teaching is less effective because it rushes to provide labels.

Traditional teaching labels a concept and then tries to make it clear. Typically, the labeled concept is explained through definitions of terms, examples, illustrations, and exercises. Exceptional learners make good use of this approach. As the labeled concept is explained, they carry on an internal conversation, mentally manipulating the material and relating it to patterns and experiences in their own life. They internally nod in agreement with the label the teacher has supplied. In other words, they actually learn it. What about the unexceptional student?

Average learners do well if they remember the supplied label, memorize some term definitions, and store it away for practical use should the opportunity or need arise. Often the lesson may enter into their working memory long enough to pass a test. Just as often, the labeled concept is not fully added to their web of learning. When asked about what they learned a month later,
they may even draw a blank. When a similar concept is taught in another discipline, they draw no connection. The Thesis Statement had to do with essay writing and the Aim was about teaching lessons... and nary the twain shall meet. The labels were committed to memory, but they are shored up by an ankle depth understanding.

In my experience, the Dialogue Education™ approach tends to avoid this sort of shallow labeling.

Perhaps one of the reasons is that the order of thinking is changed. It delays the labeling. A Dialogue lesson says, “Here’s all the information you need. Rephrase it. Chew on it. Digest it. Then let’s see what we’ve learned.” Through Learning Tasks participants carry on an external conversation about the lesson’s material by manipulating it (verbally, visually, or physically) and relating it to their own way of thinking and their own experiences. "Labeling" of a lesson is done by the student after he or she understands the concept... that satisfying “aha” of really “getting it.”

You could say that Dialogue Education™ turns the process of learning upside down. Similarly, Betty Edwards uses a remarkable “learning task” to get students to change the way they are thinking: to change how “see” the subject. She presents a line drawing turned upside down. Her students copy the drawing, still upside down. This tricks the brain so that it is less likely to label the thing and more likely to see curves, angles, and connections. When the students are finished drawing, they turn it right side up and then can “label” it, “Oh my! I drew a picture of...!” This little exercise alone can be enough to break the brain’s tendency to quickly label a thing without really “seeing” it (try it!).

Dialogue delays labeling. Is this a key difference between dialogue and traditional education? This way of looking at Dialogue Education™ might not make sense to all. For me, it helps keep the function of dialogue ahead of the form. I want my students to really think about and understand the concept before us. Let me struggle to find some learning tasks that really help them “see” it. When we’re all done, we can ask “So, what have we achieved today.” Then, let THEM tell me THEIR labels.

1Mary Etter, Voices list serve, 20 Jan 2007.
Learning to Listen – A Skill for Life

by Daniel F. Sharaiha (adaniel777@hotmail.com), Jordan

I have been told I am the first Arab who is working on being a Certified Dialogue Education™ Practitioner aiming to be a Certified Dialogue Education™ Teacher. I was hence asked to jot down my reflections on this experience. So here I am this weekend, enjoying the many relaxing facets of a resort at the Dead Sea in Jordan, the country where I was born, raised and reside, doing just that.

My first exposure to Dialogue Education™ was in 2009 at the Summer Peace Institute (SPI) at the Eastern Mennonite University (EMU). It was my third time in the US and my first at SPI. When I first started the class, I did not fully grasp the concepts that the instructors were presenting.

I come from one of the biggest Christian tribes in Jordan and the Middle East. When elders speak, the young listen. When teachers order, students obey. Dialogue is rarely encouraged within the family context, or in schools and universities. When I was studying for my B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering in Amman, even questions were rarely welcome and usually frowned at.

Jordan is a principle voice for moderation, peace and reform in the Middle East. Its difficult geographic location – surrounded by Israel, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia – brings it into constant contact with regional turbulence that affects its economy and political climate where Jihadist extremists exist and conflicts abound. Within this volatile environment, Jordan stands as an oasis of stability and a model for progress. Its progressive young ruling monarch’s vision is based on economic viability. Seventy percent of the population in Jordan is under the age of 30. Youth literacy is nearly 100 percent. Jordan is well-known for its hospitable and peace-loving people and its society is built on a code of honor. However, one year after the war on Iraq, 55% percent of Jordanians favorably viewed Osama bin Laden. Honor killings are sanctioned by law. Around 20 percent of Jordanian women approve being beaten by husbands to discipline them. Jordan’s mixed population make-up largely contributes to its many paradoxes. With all this as part of my culture, Dialogue Education™ comes as a new and refreshing approach to change!
At the Summer Peacebuilding Institute, my thoughts and ideas mattered although I was no expert on the topic. I felt immensely respected by the two progressive instructors, for I was allowed to question, disagree and even crack a few jokes! The instructors called me by my first name but never by my last. I guess ‘Daniel’ was an easy one for them. They waited on me and on my classmates and even encouraged the class to challenge them!

I have been a trainer for some years now and I used to devote my skills to ensure that the trainees’ learning experience included a lot of new information and was fun and enjoyable at the same time. But building on the learner’s experience by anchoring them was refreshing. I myself was liberated by Dialogue Education™ when I shifted from an instructor who firmly held the reigns, made all the decisions, poured the information to the listeners in the form of a monologue, was eager to speak and be heard by all learners, never sought to define the needs of the learners, to an instructor who applied Jane Vella’s principles of Dialogue Education™ by respecting the learners as decision makers, seeking to listen to learners and reflect upon what is said, seeing value in doing an assessment for the learning needs and resources... What a transformation!

That is what has started to change in me, with still a long way to go, not only as a trainer but also as a talent and development manager working in a corporation with more than 24,000 employees and as a youth leader in a couple of organizations. But most importantly, I felt the change in my capacity as a husband of a great lady and a father of a 4-year old daughter with another on the way any day now.

After comprehending the concept of Dialogue Education™ which was introduced to Jordan in April 2010 through Global Learning Partners (GLP) and through my co-teaching more than 20 NGOs and civil society trainers with Peter Noteboom, a Certified Dialogue Education™ Teacher and Senior Partner at GLP, I am now more convinced than ever that Dialogue Education™ with all the respect and safety it offers to learners is a key factor for bringing about positive change, peace and prosperity to my country and its surrounding nations. The road less travelled is challenging but I definitely think it is well worth the effort!

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2 Source: Study conducted by the Jordanian Department of Statistics, 2007.
As a learning event is planned and delivered, what takes center stage: the learner, the teacher, the learning, or something else?

As an educator, I have—in practice or theory—argued the primacy of each of these. With three decades of experience behind me, I find myself no longer promoting one focus at the expense of the others, but rather see the design and facilitation of learning events as a dynamic process that requires a kind attention to all: the learner, the teacher, and the learning.

So to the question: “Is dialogue or other effective education learning-centered, teacher-centered, or learner-centered?” I now answer, “Yes, yes, and yes.”

When we focus on the learning...
Dialogue Education™ is learning-centered in its rigorous practice of identifying the content and objectives of an event (the what? and what for?) and then building into the design a series of learning tasks (the how?) that yield indicators of learning.

Hence, in teaching advocacy and communications executives how to use their organization’s vision statement for U.S. health care, conversations were designed around a key question: How would this reform proposal move us closer to or farther from this vision for the future of U.S. health care? The indicators of learning included a scorecard on which individuals reported their personal judgment as well as a table of the cumulative individual scores—projected for all to see—that automatically generated both a spider graph and a bar chart, visual representations of their collective judgment. From the cumulative assessment, key message points—sometimes in the form of questions—were developed for use with lawmakers and the public.

In this example, the content (the what?) is “how to use our organization’s vision statement about U.S. health care in advocacy and communications work” with the corresponding objectives (the what for?) “By the close of this meeting, we as the scoring team will have: (1) used our organization’s vision statement to assess health reform proposal x, and (2) developed corresponding message points that each of us can use in communications with legislators and the public.”
As often happens, the learning from this series of tasks exceeded the expectations of the design team. People did leave with an assessment of plan x and with message points they could use. However, they also left with new insights. For example, we discovered that solutions we supported sometimes actually worked against the organization’s vision. For example, we came to see how the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), which provides health insurance to millions of children, violated our vision of an integrated system. While we continued to support this legislation, we began to shift how we talked about it, nesting our support within the larger context of the need for an integrated system out of which people would not “fall in and out” by virtue of life’s circumstances. This exercise helped the group understand that we could hold onto an ideal future while working to secure what was winnable in the current political context.

This is the potential of learning-centered design: It structures the thinking of a group in ways that often result in unanticipated and powerful outcomes.

**When we focus on the learner...**
Dialogue Education™ is learner-centered in its careful attention to knowing as much as we can about the learners (the who?) and their relationship to the content (the learning needs and resources assessment). The results of these explorations shape the learning event.

Returning to the example above, the organization had spent more than a year collaborating with key stakeholders to develop a consensual vision statement on the future of U.S. health care. The well-respected ethicist leading the process recognized that busy executives may not see the immediate usefulness of such a statement in their advocacy and communications work.

As a result, the first meeting of the scoring team needed a series of learning tasks that would walk the group step-by-step through this connection-making process: from reviewing how the vision was to developed, to using it to evaluate an actual policy, and then drawing on the results to shape key message points for use with policy makers or other communications about reform. Similarly, looking at the context revealed useful design tips: these executives regularly used scorecards and spider graphs, familiar tools that could be adapted and used in this learning event.

**When we focus on the teacher...**
Dialogue Education™ is teacher-centered when we attend to our motivations and biases and, as teachers, are transparent about these with learners.
are transparent about these with learners.

Attempts to form the scoring team described in the above examples took over a year. While the design team held firmly to the assumption that, for our organization, authentic policy and communication work on health-care reform needed to be grounded in the organization’s board-approved vision for the long-term future of U.S. health care (i.e. 25-30 years out), this was not necessarily an assumption shared by all leaders in the organization.

Gaining support for the formation of the scoring team was the result of a series of iterative conversations in which these assumptions were shared and the prototypes of tools and process tested, evaluated, and refined: a process in which teachers were learners, the learners were teachers, and above all, learning was valued.

**It’s a long way from where I started...**

Such experiences are a far cry from where I began as a teacher. As a child, I knew I wanted to teach. As the oldest of six children, my first students were younger siblings whom I bribed and cajoled into assuming the role. What energy I felt standing in front of a blackboard with lecture notes in one hand and a piece of white chalk in the other! The experience was one of sheer delight for me, but by all reports, not for the pupils, and, I suspect, was devoid of any genuine, intended learning.

For me, Dialogue Education™ offers a helpful antidote to my early practice of teacher-centered learning. When practiced with care, Dialogue Education™ honors each important “who” as it takes a turn at center stage: the learner, the teacher, and the potential emergence of a third and remarkable embodiment: the learning.

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**Michael Culliton** works as an independent consultant from the Washington, DC area. He began studying with Dr. Jane Vella and what is now Global Learning Partners in 1995. From 2006-2009, he worked with Dr. Jack Glaser at the Center for Healthcare Reform, St. Joseph Health System. He has designed and led learning events throughout the U.S. as well as in Romania and Thailand. He can be reached at Michael.Culliton@gmail.com.

The *Consensually Developed Vision Statement* and other documents referenced in this article (Individual Scoring Grid, Cumulative Scoring Sheet, Spider Chart and Bar Graph) can be found here.
The Importance of Language and Culture Learning

by Debbie Witherow, OMF Int., Manila, The Philippines

* The complete 1-hour workshop and steps of planning can be found here.

As a field language coach for our mission in The Philippines I was recently asked to speak to a mixed group of nationals who have a passion for reaching out to indigenous resistant people groups in our community. The topic they asked me to present was “the importance of learning the heart language/culture/worldview” of the people you are working with. This is a crucial topic since none of them had yet taken the time to learn the language, culture or worldview of the resistant people group in their midst and with whom they were working. I had a challenge ahead of me: How do you help someone change an attitude?

The icebreaker was an informal dialogue between me and the Filipino missionary who had invited me. We spoke in a dialect that only he and I spoke and understand. It was a good beginning to my 1-hour workshop, as it got them curious and thinking about the topic!

One thing that I had not thought much about or anticipated was what language I would use for the training session. I assumed English would be used since the group was a mix of Filipinos who spoke a variety of languages, however when I clarified this with the missionary who invited me on the morning of the event he said I should use Tagalog and some English mixed into it. So that is what I did!

This in itself had a powerful impact on the workshop design as I wove this in my session: I asked them how they felt when they heard me, a English-speaking Canadian, speaking in Tagalog; What was the emotional impact? One described it by saying that it “tickled her heart”. I then bridged this by asking them what the reasons are for not learning the heart language and culture of the people we are working with. They responded fast with lots of post-it notes that they stuck on the white board at the front of the room. I was so pleased by their honesty! While we were reflecting on this, someone insightfully said, “All these reasons are very selfish”. Indeed.
At this point in the workshop I asked everyone to get into groups to brainstorm ways they could start learning the language/culture/worldview. They came up with excellent ideas! I then handed out “commitment cards” and they all committed to one thing. We ended by sharing these in their small groups and prayed for one another.

The feedback after this 1-hour workshop was extremely positive. A light really came on for many of the learners and they left with the need for serious reflection on the topic. They even want me to come back in August or September to do more on the ‘how to’ of language and culture learning! I’m excited and encouraged by what happened.

**Design**

**Language and Culture Learning:**
*A wall of noise or a window into hearts and minds*

*Baguio Team – April 2010*

**Who? The People involved**

There are 10-20 men & women involved in this workshop. They are working in a fulltime ministry to M and volunteers. They are all able to communicate with the M people in a language other than the heart language of the people they are called to minister to.

**Why? Now what? The Situation that Calls for This Event**

Kuya Demi has been working with the group challenging them on the importance of learning the “heart language/culture/worldview” of the people they are ministering to so that they can be more effective communicators.

**Where? The Place**

In Baguio (not sure of location there)

**When? The Time**

About 60 minutes with no breaks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Content</th>
<th>The Achievement-based Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The importance of learning the heart language and culture of the people they are working with. | • Analyzed the reasons why it is important and named factors that can stop us from doing this  
• Brainstormed ways to learn the language and culture of the heart and personally selected 1 to start working on  
• Completed an action plan. |

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Language and Culture Learning:
A wall of noise or a window into hearts and minds
Baguio – April 2010

Welcome!

Task 1: What did you say? – a warm up

Speak Sorsoganon with Kuya Demi in a language unknown to the group about something serious or happy! The idea is to let the group wonder/guess/be curious about what is going on and what we are talking about.

Debrief

- How did you feel not to understand what was going on?
- What did you understand about what we were saying?
- What did you do to try to help you understand what we were saying?
- What frustrated you?
- What language do you speak when you talk to your baby, proclaim your love to your sweetheart, when you recall and tell stories of your youth and growing up?

Task 2: Why Learn Their Language

2A. We all speak many different languages for different reasons and at different times. What about the gospel message? You may have the proclaimed the gospel to the _________ people... but have they “heard” it?

Here are some reasons why it is so important to learn the heart language/ culture/ worldview of the people you are working with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Importance of Speaking Someone’s Heart Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) It demonstrates love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) You gain and show respect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) You show you care.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) We can better ‘fit’ or adapt the gospel to the people we are working with. Every language carries its own ‘cultural baggage’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2B. In groups of two or three, name things that can stop us from learning the heart language and culture of the ________ people. Write these on post-it notes, one per card.

(Have them post these and read what they wrote as they are posting it. They should only post the NEW ideas.

Debrief:

- What do you notice?
- Which one do you especially struggle with? Why?
- What role does our pride play in this?

Task 3: How Doable is This?

In your same groups, brainstorm as many steps we can and do take to learn the heart language and culture of the ________ people.

Write this list on a flip chart paper.

Let’s post all these and hear from each group.

Debrief:

- What needs more clarification?
- What was new for you?
- What excites you here?
- What more do you want to share or say about these lists?

Task 4: Taking the First Step

Get up and take a “gallery walk” around the room. Take 5 minutes to re-read the lists created by all the different groups. Select 1 action step that you want to do in the near future to work toward learning the heart language and culture of the ________ people.

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Write it in the commitment box I will give you:

| Tonight I learned the importance of learning the heart language/culture/worldview of the |   |
| people.  As a response to this, I will . . . |
| ____________________________________________ |

| ____________________________________________ |

I will start this on __________________________ |

Date: ________________________________________ |

- Who would like to share their promise?

**Task 5: Asking God for Help**

In your same group of two or three, take a few minutes to ask for God’s help in the commitments you made. With His help all this is possible.

* (give a few minutes for all the groups to pray together. When all the prayers are finished you can close the workshop).

Thank you!
How Words Become Action

by Jeanmaire Hryshko
(Jeanmaire.Hryshko@cdph.ca.gov),
Public Health Nutritionist, California Dept. of
Public Health, WIC Program

Three days after participating in a Learning To
Listen, Learning To Teach workshop provided for
the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition
Program staff, I spent several days at one of
California’s 82 agencies. As a nutritionist for the CA Department of Public Health, I was there to provide
technical assistance on program implementation. Filling the waiting room and classrooms were families
and participants reflecting WIC’s culturally diverse population. A father with twin 2-year-olds in tow, a
pregnant mother with her eight month old infant, a caregiver with a 4 year old girl and eight year old
boy, a breastfeeding mother and her 2 month old daughter – these are some of the WIC families that
make up the WIC community. A typical individual appointment with a nutritionist lasts 20-30 minutes; a
nutrition class lasts 20-45 minutes. Too few precious minutes – how best to use them?

Which brings me to this issue’s theme - "Learning-Centered,
Learner-Centered, Teacher-Centered... What’s the Difference?" In
college, I was taught: assess what someone isn’t doing or doesn’t
know, decide what they need to know and change, and instruct
on what needs to be known and done. Session over. For me, this
teacher-centered approach is characterized by a primary focus on
providing knowledge. And certainly WIC staff has much expertise

That was it - somehow the knowledge must be and stay alive. I learned at Learning to
Listen, Learning to Teach how knowledge can come alive.
and knowledge to share! But as we know, knowledge doesn’t automatically trigger behavior change.

To influence health-related behavior, the focus must shift. The learner - their reality, including barriers to change, readiness to learn, self-confidence and feelings of self-efficacy, their environment and ability to access to healthy food - determines the “what” of the knowledge shared. This approach is the basis for the new nutrition education model WIC is implementing called Participant-Centered Education. For instance, at the agency I observed the precious minutes of one-on-one sessions centering on concerns expressed by the learners, rather than a nutrition topic of the month. The difference between how I learned to provide nutrition counseling and this approach isn’t semantics; it’s real. But what about the term Learning-Centered?

The reason WIC is collaborating with Global Learning Partners is to be more successful at motivating participants to adopt healthy behaviors. Motivating – movement – motion – these words started to swirl in my head, with a life of their own. That was it - somehow the knowledge must be and stay alive. I learned at Learning to Listen Learning to Teach how knowledge can come alive. And not just for the learner, for the teacher as well. Perhaps that’s where the term Learning-Centered comes in. Rather than focusing on one party, maybe its meaning conveys that teachers are teachers and learners, and learners are learners and teachers. The learning now comes from multiple sources...that’s Learning-Centered.

See what can happen when a noun comes alive and changes to a verb?
Multiple Intelligences: How Smart Are You?  
by Roxana and Ylad Popescu  
(Romania Learning to Listen Learning to Teach course – March 2010)

WHO – the people
6 participants at the workshop: Dana Gherman, Dalila Szanto, Simona Cuibus, Dana Veres, Erzsebet Nagy, Hjnalka Lazar

1 stakeholder: Jeanette Romkema  
2 facilitators: Roxi Popescu, Vlad Popescu

All participants are females between 25 and 37, Christians, and work in social programs. They all speak English.

WHY – the reason
In previous sessions, the learners showed interest in new information regarding learning styles. For this reason, we decided to teach this topic. They want to understand intelligences so they can understand themselves and those they work with, better.

NOW WHAT – the change
The participants need to understand that they are smart in different ways, and identify their type of intelligence. Even if they put behind the traditional educational system, they will help others learn in their own way.

WHEN – the time
Thursday, March 11th, 2010, 9.30 am  
Duration: 30 minutes (practice teaching session)

WHERE – the place
Bethelen Kata building, 1 Ponorului St., 3rd floor

Furniture can be moved. Rectangular room. Walls cannot be touched. People can stay in a circle or at tables.

Materials: flipcharts, PowerPoint, hand outs

WHAT – the content
The types of intelligence (K)  
How to find your type – a test (S,A)

WHAT FOR – the achievement-based objectives
The participants will have done the following:
- named the types of intelligence and their defining characteristics  
- identified their own type of intelligence  
- developed a set of questions to determine other people’s type

HOW – the plan
Below…

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Multiple Intelligences: How Smart Are You?

Welcome and overview!

Task 1: A Knotted Up (a warm-up)
Let’s make a tight circle in front of the class. Now, with one hand take the hand of the person in front of you, and with the other take the hand of another person. The goal is to not let go and to untangle all your hands to make a full circle again. You may communicate and give advice any way you wish.

Our debrief:
How did it feel to do this exercise?
What happened throughout the process that allowed you to finally untangle your knot?
What intelligences were used to achieve your goal?

This is an example of how we used different parts of our brains to accomplish something. We are not all smart in the same way, but together we managed a difficult problem!

Task 2: What are Multiple Intelligences?
A. Listen to this short presentation on multiple intelligences:

A general overview: in 1983, a psychologist named Howard Gardner elaborated a theory... (reviewed the "MI sheet")

B. Let’s look at each of the intelligences again on the sheet titled “MI – Skills, Career Interests, and Definitions”. What job or careers would each of these people be especially good at? As you shout them out, Roxi will write these on the flip chart for us.

Task 3: Using a Case Study to Practice
In groups, review your case study and determine what type(s) of intelligence each person is.

We will hear your findings after 5 minutes.

What struck you about multiple intelligences as you were working on this exercise?
Task 4: Finding Your Own Intelligence
On your own, complete the short self-evaluation to determine your own intelligences. Take 5 minutes and then we will hear your findings.

What did you find out?
What surprised or was enlightening for you?
What do you want to understand better?

Task 5: Finding the Intelligence of a Friend or Family Member
On your own, write 3-4 questions that you want to ask a specific person you know to help determine their intelligence type. Write these below:

Who will you ask:
When will you ask:
What will you ask:
1.
2.
3.
4.

Who would like to share their plan?
Take this plan and use it when you are planning to.

Thanks for a great workshop!
Reflections on Teaching and Learning

Jennifer Giezendanner, Director for Scripture Engagement in Asia, Wycliffe Asia-Pacific
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In my first formal teaching role I remember now with a grimace how I wrote out my lesson-plans:

First, I will do such-and-such.
Then, I will do this-and-that.
Etc.

I saw the role of that class of young adult college students merely as responding to my inspirations, questions, and information. Oooh, boy! THAT was a “teacher-centered” classroom, and I’m embarrassed to admit it.

However, I did learn something then that has been well recognized since the beginning of teaching and learning: the one who teaches learns the most. Why? Because that person has invested herself more than anyone else involved in the learning event.

Now that I design learning from the standpoint of what the learners will do to learn the new content, I still learn an awfully lot. However, the investment that they make in their own learning is significantly higher, and they participate much more in the learning process: both teaching and learning, giving and taking, listening and sharing, asking questions and answering them.

The ethos I constantly aim to build is one of “learning from each other”, including the teaching team as learners. In fact, at a recent workshop our teaching team called itself the “learning team.” The participants recognized that we were modeling learning by how we asked questions and listened to their solutions and suggestions. They accepted our willingness to learn from and with them, even though it was in a very high powered distance cultural context. In fact, directly after the workshop, several learners wrote us to say that they had returned to their workplaces and begun teaching just what they had just learned the week before! We had given them all our lesson plans, teaching resources, and permission to adapt the workshop for their own situations. This demonstrated that we trusted them to be able to handle the new responsibility of teaching others regarding the new areas of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

For me, the term “learner-centered” isn’t a problem. It shows that we are focusing on people and their learning. The important thing to recognize is that everyone in the learning event is a learner, not just the ones who signed up as participants. It is teachers, teaching interns, and first-time participants who make up a complete and stimulating “learning team.”
Using Learner-centered Education to Improve Fruit and Vegetable Intake in California WIC Participants

Global Learning Partners has been providing Dialogue Education™ courses for California WIC for some years now, specifically, providing expert training and consultation to the California WIC Program in developing their Finding the Teacher Within LCE project for WIC agencies. Under a 3-year special project grant from the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, researchers have conducted a three-year evaluation study of the effectiveness of learner-centered nutrition education. The findings from this study, recently published in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, demonstrated a positive correlation between the learner-centered approach and desired outcomes; most importantly in this instance, reported changes in participants’ eating behavior. These findings are also consistent with other recently published findings that support the use of participant-centered / learner-centered approaches to facilitate health behavior change.


Give us your feedback... We invite your comments and suggestions! What did you find useful in this issue? What would you like to see in the next issue? Please send your comments and suggestions to jeanette@globalearning.com or debra@globalearning.com.

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