# Introduction
Dialogue Education Today

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T he structured system that we call *dialogue education* was designed to implement the ideas of Paulo Freire, Kurt Lewin, and many other teachers whose passion was for learning. I see dialogue education today as a viable and effective alternative to prevailing structures of formal and informal adult education.

Origins of Dialogue Education

Why does adult education need an alternative? Paulo Freire compared monologue—what he called the *banking system*—to problem-posing education, or dialogue. Freire's phrase referred to how the teacher deposited information into the minds of learners, who returned the information, with interest, on tests and examinations. In contrast, problem-posing education or dialogue meant that concepts, skills, or attitudes were presented as open questions for reflection and integration into a particular context (Freire, 1972). Monologue today is often seen in the lecture hall or conference center, where a teacher makes a presentation of information and data, with little or no engagement of learners, and little design for learning. It is also seen in lengthy presentations at training sessions and orientation programs in the public and not-for-profit sectors. It is experienced in international settings where hierarchical, colonial education processes persist.
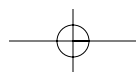
The structured approach to dialogue presented in this volume focuses on learning, not teaching. This casebook offers twenty-three examples of significant learning. The purpose of this research is to turn our practice into praxis—reflection on action—so that readers can explore the possibility of using dialogue in their own educational context.

My History with Dialogue Education

In the late 1960s, I was a professor at the Institute of Education of the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Julius Nyerere, the nation's first president, was an advocate and articulate voice for authentic education. He urged the new nation to redesign the colonial system to fit the Tanzanian context. However, the educational practices at the university were far from what Nyerere intended. I was seriously considering a change of career: I could not continue in this domination system. Then, a friend told me about an exciting book she was reading: *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* by Paulo Freire (1972). I found in Freire's work a conceptual alternative to domination: problem-posing dialogue.

Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher and linguist, says of dialogue: "Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293).

Dialogue education as described and analyzed in these stories is rooted in that position so clearly expressed by Bakhtin. It is based on the work of Paulo Freire, and the research of Kurt Lewin, who recognized the need for greater equity in the relationship of adult learners and teachers. This approach falls under the umbrella of *social constructivism,* and it can be a means toward transformational learning. We present here one format that uses the work of all these

thinkers. That format is composed of a set of principles (Vella, 1995, 2002) and practices.

Anne Hope and Sally Timmell, authors of *Training for Transformation* (Hope, Timmell, and Hodzi, 1984), offered two-week courses in community education for dialogue in Nairobi, Kenya. I moved from the university into a community education setting, designing Community Education for Development, a leadership development program, with invaluable input from Hope and Timmell. That experience led to my doctoral dissertation (Vella, 1978), in which a structure of principles and specific practices began to emerge. As a professor at North Carolina State University, I organized these principles and practices into a system that I called *popular education,* after the model offered by Freire. The Jubilee Popular Education Center, which opened in 1981, was a source of action research as we taught this approach to teachers and trainers, health workers, and managers. From Freire's noble abstractions, an eclectic system of adult education based on dialogue developed.

One spring day in 1992 Malcolm Knowles, my colleague at North Carolina State University, and his wife, Hulda, sat at my dinner table. I confessed that I had a manuscript in the bottom drawer of my desk. . . . Malcolm smiled and kindly offered me a referral to the president of Jossey-Bass Publishers, Lyn Luckow, who had been a graduate student under Professor Knowles at the Fielding Graduate Institute. That was the beginning of a wonderful journey into this present research. The book that emerged from that garbled manuscript, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach,* originally published in 1994, is influencing adult educators around the world. Jossey-Bass published three later books: *Training Through Dialogue* (1995), *How Do They Know They Know?* (1998), and *Taking Learning to Task* (2000). Dialogue education now has a firm foothold as one form expressing adult learning theories of participation, constructivism, and transformational learning.

We teach the way we have been taught. All of the authors writing cases for this book have studied with Global Learning Partners, Inc. (formerly the Jubilee Popular Education Center). This is a set

of first-generation evidence. Each person I invited to join this research said this: "Thank you for the invitation! Even if my work does not get published, I am excited about doing it. I am grateful for this chance to examine my educational work this way." These men and women show themselves to be not only good educators but also very good social scientists.

Principles and Practices

The model of dialogue education presented in this casebook is highly structured, but that structure looks different in different situations. Our hope is that the action research in this casebook can influence and develop that structure, those principles and practices, and the growing theory and practice of dialogue education. In the appendix you will find an updated summary of current principles and practices.

Dialogue education is holistic in that none of these principles and practices can be omitted with impunity. We have not yet named all the principles and practices that are at work in effective adult learning.

The evaluation concept of learning, transfer, and impact (Vella, Berardinelli, and Burrow, 1998) is central to dialogue education: learning occurs *within* the program, not in a study hall later on. What occurs after the learning event is transfer. This is what adult learners do with the learning in their context. Impact is the change that occurs in individuals or organizations as a function of the learning. Explicit indicators of learning, transfer, and impact are useful for evaluation.

The Seven Design Steps

The Seven Design Steps—based on the classic questions *who, why, when, where, what, what for,* and *how*—form a distinctive planning instrument in this model of dialogue education. *Who*—the participants—and *why*—the situation of this learning event—together provide an essential set of information for the designer.

The learning needs and resource assessment is designed and used to respond to those two opening questions. *When*—the time frame of the session—and *where*—the site—provide the parameters within which to design. *What*—the content of concepts, knowledge, skills, and behaviors manifesting attitudes—and *what for*—the distinctive achievement-based objectives of the learning session—set up the learning tasks. The *how*—the learning tasks and materials—presents the work of learners and teacher throughout. You will read about the Seven Design Steps in many of these chapters. They provide a vital instrument for creating a design that ensures accountability.

Assumptions

This model of dialogue education assumes that human beings come to learning with some appetite, and that they can and will make intelligent choices. The stories in this casebook bear out this assumption. We assume that folks come prepared to work hard, and to work together. We assume that adults come to a learning event with abundant life experience. We assume that levels of honesty can and will deepen as safety is established and meaning becomes clear. We assume that learners have and will take the time to reflect both during the course and during transfer. We assume that the resources provided for follow-up will be accessible and utilized. We assume that a process and protocols for leading dialogue can be learned and repeated with quality assurance. We assume that learning, transfer, and impact can be demonstrated through specific quantitative and qualitative indicators. These assumptions may seem naïve. The events described in this case book demonstrate how realistic they are.

Prospects for Dialogue Education

My friend's son is a Park Scholar at North Carolina State University. As a freshman, he took a history course on the Middle East taught by a visiting professor from that region. On the first day of the seminar, the professor came in with an armload of books.

He said to the twelve students: "We have fourteen weeks. Your task is to read all of these. I will help you understand them. Then, design a peace plan for the Middle East. I am going back to Jerusalem in June. If you have anything to offer, I will bring it to people who have power there."

Immediacy, engagement, respect, learning task, clear roles, safety, sequence, reinforcement—all were there! Look at his assumptions about those young students. This scholar was using dialogue education. He did so without even a glance at this model. It was simply good teaching and good learning!

It should be noted that good learning means there is a minimum of traditional "telling." Good teaching is the other side of the coin. Good teaching in this model is good design: doing a learning needs and resource assessment, using the Seven Design Steps, setting learning tasks with reinforcement, safety, accountability, respect for learners. It involves using all of the principles and practices. It is an implementation based on all of the assumptions named earlier.

This is our vision: readers of this book will experiment with forms of dialogue education in universities and colleges and in public and not-for-profit organizations all around the world.

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