

COLLABORATIVE-DIALOGUE TIPS FOR OPTIMIZING THE POSSIBILITY

Harlene Anderson, Ph.D.

I. Inviting and sustaining the conditions for collaborative-dialogue requires a shift in orientation.

- The conditions and the stance of the inviter flows from these assumptions.
- The conditions are intertwined, none stand alone.
- The shift in orientation naturally guides actions that invite collaborative-dialogue.
- Dialogue does not require personal attributes or repeatable skills.

II. Dialogue requires collaborative design.

- Collaborative design is part of the process of co-generating newness in meaning, understanding and action.
- Collaborative design requires inviting and respecting the other person's expertise.
- Each dialogue is unique to the participants, their situations, circumstances and goals, as will be the next one.

III. Dialogue is a natural, spontaneous activity that occurs moment-to-moment.

- You can prepare for dialogue but you cannot plan or pre-structure it.
- Dialogue is not a lineal process that is not sequential or repeatable.
- What is produced in dialogue cannot be traced back to a starting point, significant moment or person: these are observer punctuations.
- Dialogue cannot be implemented, orchestrated or managed.
- Dialogue is rhizomatic; there is no one entryway and no entryway is more correct than another.
- Dialogue is sporadic: it wanders and surprises and takes unexpected twists and turns.
- Dialogue is impossibly constant but it must be continual and sustainable.

IV. Differences are critical to dialogue.

- Differences such as tension, nonclarity, ambiguity, incoherency, uncertainty and misunderstanding necessarily inhabit dialogue.
- Dialogue is multi-dimensional.
- Each encounter--relationship and conversation--is part of past, present and future ones.
- Dialogue entails a multiplicity of voices: inner and outer and present and not present.
- Context is the backdrop for dialogue: historical, cultural, organizational, relational, etc.

V. Dialogue requires:

- Speaking, listening, hearing and responding.
- Complete receptivity and trust for the other and their difference.
- Openness to being questioned, critiqued and not agreed with.
- Carefulness to not assume what the other person means nor fill in the blanks or details of the other's story or what is thought to be behind it.
- Understanding from the other's sense-making/logic map, not yours.
- Checking-out to make sure you understand the other's perspective as best you can.
- Understanding does not mean agreement.
- Time for inner and outer talk and inner and outer reflections with self and other.
- Pauses and silences provide opportunity for reflection, inner talk and preparation to speak.

VI. Actions that do not invite dialogue.

- Trying, subtly or otherwise, to persuade the other to understand or agree with you.
- When engaged with the above you are not in dialogue with yourself or the other.
- Asking questions that you *think* you know the answer to or to get the answer that you want.

VIII. The intent and hope of the inviter of dialogue is:

- To Invite and engage one's self and the other in dialogue.
- To be open to where the dialogue takes you.
- To create a process of "dynamic sustainability".
- Yet, importantly, the inviter must not hold onto the intent and hope.

Harlene Anderson, Ph.D.

Houston Galveston Institute/Taos Institute

harleneanderson@earthlink.net

October 2013