

Dialogue Education: A Case Book

Foreword by
Margaret Wheatley ©2003

This book is filled with treasures, many different ways to use dialogue in settings as varied and interesting as the whole wide world. This shouldn't come as a surprise, to realize that dialogue works everywhere, in such diverse places. The reason it's no surprise is that conversation is the most fundamental of human pleasures, no matter our culture or upbringing. Conversation has always been the primary way we humans came together, thought together, planned together, dreamed together. It is what we like to do most.

It's hard to look past the complicated processes of our time to this simple truth. We live in an age when there is a specific technique for almost everything. We have to learn a sophisticated process for setting goals, for strategic planning, for communicating, for thinking creatively. We've allowed basic human capacities, skills possessed by humans everywhere, to be taken from us. We've decided that experts and complex techniques are absolutely necessary if we need to plans, set goal, communicate, be creative, or change the world. Far too many of us have forgotten that we already know how to do these things, far too many of us have been separated from our basic human competence. Even dialogue has become too technical a term for me, becoming specialized and requiring expert facilitators. I value most the work of those in these pages who make dialogue simple and accessible once again.

Everyone I know who has been engaged in dialogue work eventually admits that people don't need as much instruction in dialogue as they need encouragement *to remember it*. The more you do dialogue work, the more you learn to trust that all of us, by virtue of being human, carry a deep, primal memory of being together and talking to each other.

This species' memory goes far back in time. The earliest archeological record of humans sitting in circle goes back nearly 500 million years, perhaps even before there were homo sapiens. (These circles may have been created by homo erectus.) Whoever they were, they sat around fires, and the need to keep warm was the reason they formed as circles. Had they sat in rectangular fashion, some of them would have frozen!

When we today sit together and engage in real conversation, talking about the things that matter most to us, we can trust that we are evoking this species' memory. In our brightly lit, artificial offices and rooms, something, someone, is speaking to us from the flickering firelight shadows of history. They perhaps knew more than we do these days. They knew they had to be together, that without each other they would perish. They knew that by gathering together, they would find warmth and comfort from the terrors of the dark. It would be good for us to realize that 500 million years later, we still have the same needs, we still face the same perils if we try and go it alone.

The great Chilean biologist, Humberto Maturana, has speculated that humans developed the capacity for language when we moved into family groups. Living intimately, we became curious about one another. We wanted to know who we were, and so we invented language, words and concepts that would help us describe the world we were feeling and experiencing. Maturana has named his recent work, "The Biology of Love."

We've journeyed too far from that initial curiosity and love that led us to create language. Today we struggle to hide our thoughts, to live inside our own version of reality, and to avoid the explorations that once were so fascinating to us as a species. We've become more afraid of one another than curious, and we've retreated into cold, dark places of isolation and fear.

But we can get out of this place. Nearly every human being has the desire for connection. We still want to find each other at the fire, to share our experiences, to think about how we might live together so that more may benefit. In this volume, you will read the records of those who dared to recreate the fire and were courageous enough to call us together through the darkness. They tell their stories so that we too might remember: humans want to be together to dream a better world into existence.