

Dialogue Education™ as a Philosophy of Life

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I remember my dad's opinion on education. He reminded me constantly that it really didn't matter how "educated" one is, if education didn't teach one how to live. I guess this is one of the reasons I regard Dialogue Education™ (DE) as more than just a process; it is becoming a way of life for me. When the principles it teaches and espouses become part and parcel of how you approach life, I believe DE crosses the threshold from being merely educational to a philosophy of life.



One of the most valuable aspects of DE is its attention to "the whole". As a systems thinker, it is an important skill to be able to move seamlessly from analysis (separating) to synthesis (putting together). DE not only gives you the tools to do this but is by its very design holistic. This characteristic seems to position DE uniquely by giving it the ability to situate itself in both the collectivist and individualistic cultures in a way that few other processes can lay claim to. I have



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used DE and its principles in all sorts of settings and environments, not just as an education tool but as a way of engaging complex issues.

One such tool is an approach to peace and reconciliation in my original country of birth, Sri Lanka. After the government disarmed the terrorists in March 2009 and ended a 26-year-old ethnically-based conflict, many groups of well-meaning and peace-seeking people needed a process to help bring reconciliation among the people of the land; one that would establish an enduring and sustainable peace that would be foundational to social cohesion, mutual well-being and help nurture the common good. The issue was that the government, in its obsession to eliminate the terrorists (who belong to a particular ethnic group) also began to exhibit paranoia towards anyone who belonged to this ethnicity or who questioned the actions of the government. This, together with the fact that people had lost hope and had tethered themselves to the past, didn't help. One of these concerned citizen groups approached me for ideas.

Reconciliation, as we know requires people to agree on a common narrative or at least, have a willingness to consider one. I suggested that we help people to get there by asking them to construct a grand narrative of hope for the future by contributing their own "mini-stories". The stories would be of what they would like see in 2020; visions of hope, trust, justice and equality. By doing this, people would have a chance to shed the handcuffs of the past and move to a place where they could begin to hope again, in community and for the community. The idea had immediate acceptance and success. The group has plans to collect 10 million such stories and weave them into a grand narrative. *(More on this in a later communication.)*

How does DE figure in all of this? As I explained earlier, it has become a way of thinking and approach for me; a culture. Call it what you want, but it's an inseparable part of my psyche. As its principles continue to influence my work and life, it is bound to grow and develop further as a process, in and through me. As Jane Vella so wisely states in her most recent book "On Teaching and Learning: Putting the Principles and Practices of Dialogue Education into Action" (Jossey-Base2008):

In my understanding of this education method, the means is dialogue, the end is learning, the purpose is peace. (p. 214)



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