No Discussion Allowed: The Use of Dialogue to Engage Adult Students

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Abstract: The backbone of andragogy is the idea that adult students who enter university classes have a wealth of knowledge that they are eager and willing to share. In-class conversations give students the opportunity to present their views and collaborate on better understanding subject matter. To facilitate the student's involvement in the learning process, discussions, both written and oral, have been considered the accepted method of empowering and encouraging participation. This tool; however, is most effective when students possess working levels of course knowledge. When this knowledge is low or not-existent, the learning and participation expectation levels are seldom met. The use of dialogue is a successful approach that can be employed to meet those expectations.

Keywords: Conversation in the classroom, Classroom dialogue, Classroom discussion, Increasing classroom participation.

1. Introduction

The theory of adult education known as andragogy, as posited by Malcolm Knowles, is based on the idea that individual adult learners have already gained the fundamental bits and pieces of course knowledge through life experiences, work skills, and autonomous learning. Through facilitator led group conversations, this fragmented knowledge is constructed into formalized information from which new knowledge is then generated (Knowles, 1980). The key ingredient to successful use of group conversations in this context is the level of existing student knowledge and their willingness to recognize and share that knowledge. When either of these prerequisites are none existent or at a low level, either the level of expectant knowledge generation has to be lowered or an alternate conversational tool has to be employed to encourage a comparable level of new knowledge. A minority of existing literature on classroom conversations is based on the andragogy form of instruction and few of those address adult learners. However; by reviewing existing literature from the perspective of the principles of andragogy and adult learners, a conversational model most likely to produce the anticipated level of student learning can be identified.

2. Andragogy and Conversations

The art of conversation can take many different forms depending on the situation and the persons involved. From personal observation and in conversations with other facilitators of adult education, the general observation is that over the last few years, the number of students attending adult universities who come from, or possess extensive knowledge of, professional occupations, has diminished at the same time the number of students from non-professional occupations have increased. Whether this trend is wide spread or limited to specific geographical location will need additional research. While this demographic shift may be temporary or even cyclic, it presents the possibility that the level of knowledge generated in classroom conversations may vary from class to class based on the demographic makeup of each class. Since the andragogy approach utilizes student knowledge sharing to anchor course materials in the real world, this variance can pose a threat to the expected level of student understanding. While facilitators can measure the level of knowledge demonstrated by each student through weekly course assessments, these assessments are usually in the form of essays or specific activities and are corrected during the week following the class session so student accomplishment measures are not available until a week after the class. Reopening

conversations to cover missed material or attempting to raise the knowledge level during the following week's class is a difficult and often confusing solution. The question then becomes how can class conversations be altered so that a high level of student understanding is maintained and measured, with as little variance as possible, over classes with diverse student demographics?

3. Conversational Tools

While there are several types of conversation that people use to communicate, there are three that are the most applicable and widely used in classroom situations: Debate, discussion, and dialogue.

3.1 Debate

The word debate is a 14th century word that means a quarrel, dispute, or disagreement and comes from the French word debattre which means "'to fight', from de- 'down, completely' + batre to 'beat'" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2010). Debate is a form of conversation that by its nature polarizes participants into opposing fortresses of ideas from which they launch attacks on their opponents through arguments, points, and counter points. The goal of each side is to present arguments that carry a preponderance of persuasion so that third parties judge the effectiveness of each side's arguments and espouse the ideas of the winning side. In classroom situations, facilitators use the debate form of conversation as a tool to demonstrate the importance of formulating ideas into substantive and cohesive thoughts for use in persuasive communications. Since the debate tool is unique to certain courses such as law, or is used primarily as a tool to give students experience in developing good arguments with the outcome of the conversation being of little or no consequence, it will not be considered as a tool of classroom conversation in this article.

3.2 Discussion

Discussions are the most utilized type of conversation in andragogy-based classroom conversations. The term discussion often carries a very loose definition that includes any classroom conversation led by a facilitator, in which all parties treat each other with some level of respect. The base meaning of the word, however, adds a much richer understanding of this type of conversation. Discussion is a mid-14th century word meaning "examination, investigation, or judicial trial" and comes from two root words. The first root is *discus* which connotes a disc or platter (Harper, 2010). The second root word, *discutere*, is the same as found in percussion and concussion and connotes the idea of shaking, beating together, and fragmenting or shattering (Bohm, 1962). The combination of the two root words present the picture of a disc being thrown against something and breaking apart. From this metaphor, two ideas about discussions can be extrapolated. The first idea is of two or more parties bringing their individual points of view and trying to convince the others that their views are right by throwing out arguments to support their point of view. These arguments smash into each other and the *disc*, or subject under consideration, is broken into pieces. By showing the correctness of their views of the individual pieces, the correctness of their views of the *disc* is demonstrated.

> Discussion is almost like a Ping-Pong game, where people are batting the ideas back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself. Possibly you will take up somebody else's ideas to back up your own - you may agree with some and disagree with others - but the basic point is to win the game. That's very frequently the case in a discussion (Bohm, 1992, para. 3).

The second idea is that discussion takes the *disc* and breaks it into small pieces and then each of these small pieces is examined and through consensus, reassembled into something from which some direction can be found. The end result of combining these two ideas is a two-stage process that enables the class to arrive at a consensus. Those students who have some knowledge of the subject matter present their persuasive arguments and break the subject into small enough pieces that common ground can be established on each. From this common ground, a subject matter structure is created that meets the expectations of the students and consensus is reached.

3.3 Dialogue

Dialogue is a 13th century word meaning a "literary work consisting of a conversation between two or more persons" and comes from two Greek root words: dia, or *through*, and logos, or *meaning*. The contextual sense is that of holding a subject up and using words to examine it from all angles with the intent of understanding its place within social, cultural, and world environments. Bohm (1992) describes dialogue as "a *stream of meaning* flowing among and through us and between us" (para. 2). The object of this type of conversation is not to understand all the pieces that go into the subject, but rather to accept the subject as a whole and understand its relationship to the various environments in which it resides.

There is a substantial body of research on the use of classroom conversations in which the term *dialogue* is given to the best method of helping students to learn. However, in much of this research, (Scott, 2009; Rader & Summerville n.d.) for example, the term is used to describe any form of conversation in which the instructor guides collaborative student activities or discussions. While this is an important research in understanding classroom conversations and activities, some of which is cited here, the term *dialogue* as used in this article is limited to the idea of conversations among peers in which the topic is viewed from each participant's perspective. The goal is not only to understand the topic as it exists in the various environments, but to generate new understanding and knowledge. William Isaacs (1999) calls dialogue "a conversation with a center instead of sides" (Issacs, 1999, p.103).

4. Discussion or Dialogue?

The usefulness of any tool depends largely on the skill of the craftsman and conversation tools are no different. In the hands of a skilled craftsman, ordinary classes can become centers of active learners, eager to continue a conversational thread and share their knowledge of the subject matter. But how many facilitators are true craftsmen, skilled in the use of these tools?

The very nature of most adjunct faculties who utilize andragogy is that they are first and foremost practitioners of their trade and not seasoned educators. This lack of specific education training and experience presents a barrier that causes some faculty to lack the confidence to allow *useful* conversations in their classes; however, conversations should be a part of every class. "If teachers fail to introduce discussion into the classroom because they lack facilitation skills, developing such skills is an obvious topic for professional development" (Beder& Medina, 2001, p. iv).

There have been several faculty workshops for adult educators over the years on how to utilize classroom conversations, and at each of these workshops the same issues dominate the conversation: How to keep classroom conversations from being dominated by one or two students and how to encourage reticent students to become engaged in the conversations. The usual answer for these dilemmas is to direct questions to every student in an effort to elicit participation, whether they have anything useful to say or not. One danger to this tact is that conversations can become class *filler* or just a way of *engaging* students. This approach minimizes the effectiveness and potential of good, directed, and facilitated conversation. To become comfortable and masterful at facilitating conversations requires some research to understand the basic concepts, and then experience through in-class conversational interactions with students (Kahl and Schmitz, 2010, p110).

4.1 Discussion as a Conversation Tool

There are several good uses for discussion within the classroom environment and determining the most effective use of discussion depends upon several factors. In courses such as science and mathematics, where specific outcomes are known, the discussion tool can be used to guide students to the correct answer while allowing them to explore the details and arrive at conclusions that fit well into their existing knowledge base. In most of these courses, the answer is already well established and the student's job is to understand how to get to the correct answer and then how to use it in their environment. The *Return of Investment* (ROI) and *Net Present Value* (NPV) are two universal mathematical tools used in determining the wisdom of making certain types of investments. While the algorithms have been proven over time, class discussions on how to use these tools help students to understand how they can be applied to various types of

investment opportunities. By breaking down the various components, students are better able to recognize how the total algorithm functions and can be applied to the decision process. To reach the level of expectation for the conversation using discussion requires the facilitator to use skillful manipulation so that all the students arrive at the expected destination. Allowing students to actively participate in exploring the paths toward a mutual understanding moves the class from the routine of lecture to the unexpected emotional highs and lows of attaining some level of truth.

The skill level of the students affects classroom conversations and must also be considered in determining when and how to use the discussion tool. If a class is made up of professionals from the same field, the discussion tool is helpful in forcing students to analyze their own views in order to discover their strong and weak points. While they may have very strong opinions on some facets of their profession, a good discussion will require them to backup those opinions with facts or examples that come from good critical thinking. Trying to convince others, who are in the same field and consider themselves to be experts at some level, can push students into areas of self-realization that highlight the need for additional knowledge and skills within their given discipline.

Information Technology (IT) is a field that encompasses many specific fields of expertise. Many of the undergraduate IT courses are general in nature so the students in these classes represent many varied disciplines. A discussion on how to apply effective security measures to generalized computer systems can become extremely spirited with students presenting facts based on their areas of expertise. Since the required levels of security measure knowledge differ greatly from one discipline to another, some students are forced to recognize their limited knowledge on the subject while others are forced to segregate their knowledge of security in order to present a cohesive and succinct statement on the subject as it only applies to their area of expertise.

The discussion tool does excite some students and give them the opportunity to share their personal experiences and perspectives on the subject at hand. Facilitators who are considered experts in their field can often find it difficult to explain concepts in ways that are easy for students to grasp. Classroom discussion presents the opportunity for knowledgeable students to provide understandable explanations. There are always students who lack familiarity with the material, and hearing explanations with real examples provided by other students, help them to better understand and add to their knowledge base.

While there are obvious advantages to the use of discussions in class, there are also disadvantages. Those students who lack the same level of knowledge as their peers often find it difficult to participate (Jahng and Bullen, 2012, para. 4), and when they do try, they feel inadequate and embarrassed. While most students refrain from openly making fun or ridiculing other students who lack their level of knowledge, the perception of ridicule often persists and the resulting fear makes less knowledgeable students hesitant to try again. In a yearlong study on why students are silent in the classroom, Mary Reda found:

> The students in the study also consider their self-images, their knowledge, and their comfort levels with criticism and confrontation in the classroom setting when deciding whether to speak or be silent. They understand that their classmates' opinions of them will be affected, if not formed, by the opinions they offer in class. And that makes speaking out a complex negotiation. Students know that their contributions to a discussion—say, ones that challenge another student, or that are misconstrued—on highly charged issues like affirmative action might irrevocably brand them as racists. They understand that what you say can easily become who you are. (Reda, 2010, para. 8)

In less knowledgeable students, the results from the discussion might not match the expectations of the conversation.

There is a more critical issue with discussions, and that is the scope that frames a student's knowledge. Those students who seem to possess good knowledge of a subject, often only have viable knowledge in a specific area within the subject. For instance, a teller might be considered to have great knowledge of the banking industry, while in fact, the only viable knowledge consists of teller duties. As long as the students stay within their expertise, discussions can do well; however, when they expand beyond that, the information they provide may not be accurate. Because they are *in the field*, the information they provide is accepted by the other students as fact which leads to confusion   and   makes   learning   difficult (Bohm, 1992), p3).

The move from expertise to an expansion of perceived knowledge cannot be backed by facts, and participants often rely on domineering tactics such as off-hand comments and superior demeanors to force acceptance of their views. Writing of perceived knowledge as assumptions, Bohm (1992) noted that "…these assumptions are defended when they are challenged. People frequently can't resist defending them, and they tend to defend them with an emotional charge" (p. 2). These heightened emotions produce attitudes that can lead to confrontations in which students tend to behave poorly. Since emotions play a large part in discussion-based conversations, conflict management must be a part of the facilitator's skill set in order to successfully lead the class though the vulnerabilities of conversation.

4.2 Dialogue as a Conversation Tool

A tool that appears very similar to the discussion tool, yet is vastly different, is the dialogue tool. This tool has been around for centuries and was a favorite device used by Plato (Futter, 2011). Unlike the discussion tool, which takes known knowledge, breaks it down, analyses the pieces, and then reassembles them to form a different or more advanced view, dialogue seeks to take known knowledge and analyze how it interacts with different environments. Kahl and Schmitz (2010) present the idea this way: "As we have discovered the art of dialogue is much more than understanding sides, it is an emergence of the center" (p113). A discussion on ethics might center on specific issues and attitudes that drive people to make unethical decisions while a dialogue would center on the cultural issues that determine both ethics and how people from various cultures view them. An example of these two approaches would be the network administrator of a large city whose main responsibility was the security of the various municipal computer networks. His managers wanted the master password to the networks but because he felt the password would not be kept confidential, he refused to provide it. The city paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for experts to crack the code; but to no avail. After meeting with the mayor, the administrator provided the code to him. While the administrator was tried and convicted of a crime, there is still a question of ethics (Vijayan, 2010). A discussion on this example would center on the individual's actions while a dialogue would center on the expectations that the job placed on the administrator. I use this example in several courses as a demonstration of discussion verses dialogue. After a discussion, the consensus of every class is that the administrator acted unethically. The classes are then led in a dialogue and at the end of the conversation, the consensus changes to the feeling that the administrator acted ethically and his managers acted unethically. By viewing a situation from a cultural rather than individual perspective, the total picture emerges and the actions of the administrator become just a piece of the picture rather than the focus.

The obvious centerpiece of dialogue is that the outcome is unknown and can be very multifaceted when the conversation is allowed to become as rich as the *environments* that are introduced into the dialogue. This tool is especially useful in courses such as ethics, communications, and management, which are centered more on fluid concepts and ideas than on solid facts. A simple topic, such as pets, can be expanded beyond what pets are or how to care for pets, into a global environment in which pets are viewed from multiple perspectives. What do other countries use for pets, how do they consider and care for their pets, and what about countries that use pets for food? These can all be brought into the dialogue as environments. As the conversation progresses, students begin to understand that while their view of pets is important, it is only one view and in order to gain the knowledge needed to fully understand the subject they must view pets from a more holistic view point.

One of the most perplexing classroom problems is students who fail to actively participate in classroom conversations. The easy assumption facilitators often make is that these students are ill-prepared, extremely shy, bored, or lack the knowledge to feel comfortable in open discussions. Mary Reda, a composition professor, conducted a yearlong research project in which she had her students write about their experience with classroom silence. From that research she found that "Student silence isn't necessarily a problem. Some students choose silence because it best fits their learning style, culture, or history" (Reda, 2010, para. 10). Understanding that silence may be the way that some students learn, the task of the facilitator should shift from forcing participation through direct questions or grading tactics, to creating conversations that account for student learning styles, culture, and history. There are also students who are not adept at speaking and simultaneously contemplating; being silent gives them the opportunity to integrate

other student views into their own perspectives. Then there are those students who are not skilled in academic discourse who need time and space to "translate" their thinking (Reda, 2010, para. 11).

When used correctly, the dialogue tool can help "solve" the dilemma of the quiet student. To assist quiet students in assimilating the knowledge available in class conversations, while teaching vocal students the importance of introspection, time for reflection can be inserted into classroom dialogue. Students may also be asked to frame their comments in light of the other student's points of view. This fosters listening and gives students the time and space needed to integrate the ideas and contributions of other students into their own database of knowledge (Reda, 2010, para. 14).

By introducing the idea that every point of view, even no view at all, is important, and allowing time for introspection, more students are drawn into the active session. Those students with no factual knowledge can present their concepts about the subject without feeling inadequate or maligned. Those students, who feel constrained to speak because of their learning style, culture, or history, become drawn into the conversation by the conversation itself and not by any form of coercion. The consistent use of the dialogue tool provides an environment where many of these students can become more comfortable speaking in class and will develop better skills in listening, and speaking while simultaneously digesting the comments of others. When they have successfully expanded their comfort zones and overcome the hindrances of learning style, culture, and history, they can more easily share their views and ideas and become better contributors to the conversation.

Because the base of classroom dialogue is to examine how the subject matter relates to various environments, every participant's view is equally important and carries the same weight.

> There is no 'road' to truth. What we are trying to say is that in this dialogue we share all the roads and we finally see that none of them matters. We see the meaning of all the roads, and therefore we come to the 'no road'. Underneath, all the roads are the same because of the very fact that they are 'roads' – they are rigid (Bohm, 1992, page 11).

This emphasis on environment also reduces the need in those students with good subject matter knowledge to expand their expertise. Unlike with discussions, dialogue encourages students to think about views and not about facts, and this removes the need for knowledge expansion, encourages participation, and enhances the learning environment.

The dialogue tool provides an environment in which students can exchange ideas and personal feelings without the pressure of emotional stress. The goal of dialogue is to understand the perspectives of others (Rothman, 1996), which requires each person to identify and abandon any assumptions they may have on the subject matter or about other students. The process of dialogue helps to reveal these assumptions so that the students can eventually move toward being free of them. This allows them to explore new vistas beyond their assumptions (Bohm, 1992). When either individual or group assumptions are allowed to enter the dialogue conversation, the inquiry necessary to form meaningful interactions cannot occur (Issacs, 1994). When assumptions and opinions are put aside, the accompanying emotions are forestalled in favor of focusing on rationality (Yungbluth and Johnson, 2010). When students feel free to exchange ideas without emotional retribution, the result is a rich understanding of the subject and how it can be viewed from every student's perspective.

An important aspect of dialogue is that by removing the pressure to refute or defend positions, students have the opportunity to slow the conversation down and contemplate what others in the group have said. Each listener is able to reflect back to individual speakers, and to the rest of the group, to view some of the assumptions and unspoken implications of what is being expressed along with that which is being avoided. It creates the opportunity for each participant to examine the preconceptions, prejudices and the characteristic patterns that lie behind his or her thoughts, opinions, beliefs and feelings; along with the roles he or she tends habitually to play. And it offers an opportunity to share these insights (Bohm, Factor, and Garrett, 1992, para. 11).

In her Master's Theses describing her journey from being an average elementary school teacher to a true learner, Jane Kenefick comes to this conclusion:

> Clearly dialogue goes beyond a surface level of conversation. Words are more than mere words. Their meaning requires the coalescence of thinking of all in the group to help its discovery.

Maintaining an awareness of ourselves, our thoughts, others and their thoughts and the direction this brings us in is part of the meta-cognitive process. This critical thinking is essential to learning (Kenefick, 2004, p. 30).

Critical thinking then, is essential to learning, and learning is essential to becoming successful in business, and in life. It is that quality that allows for good decision making as well as an understanding of the world we live in. "Students must develop portable skills: critical thinking, cross-discipline thinking, the ability to make connections between ideas, and the ability to keep learning" (French, 2007, p. 38).

The key of course, is the willingness of participants to enter into good dialogue. The things that mostly get in the way of good dialogue are participants defending their assumptions and opinions. By focusing on resisting anything that is contrary to their position, they fail to listen properly and therefore miss what is really being said (Bohm, 1992).

Table 1
Differences between dialogue and discussion

Dialogue	Discussion
Starts with listening	Starts with speaking
Is about speaking with	Is about speaking to
Focuses on insights	Focuses on differences
Is collaborative	Is adversarial
Generates ideas	Generates conflicts
Encourages reflection	Encourages quick thinking
Encourages emergence	Encourages lock-in

Note. From "Dialogue", by Richard Steel principal, 2008, New Paradigm Consulting. Retrieved from: http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/Dialogue.htm. Reprinted with permission.

As with any tool, dialogue can present problems if not used carefully. While discussions are usually structured around specific subject matter, dialogue requires more of a holistic approach. Facilitators need to be well prepared on the subject and be willing to allow the subject to expand beyond their expectations during those magic learning moments. Like the discussion tool, dialogue takes practice and preparation, and some facilitators may find it difficult to master. Table 1 is a simple table compiled by Richard Steel, a management consultant, which lists the major differences between dialogue and discussion.

5. A Practical Approach to Dialogue

Just as in any successful endeavor, there must be good planning and consistent follow through. Successful implementation of dialogue based conversations starts in the first class and includes an explanation of dialogue and a stern warning that no debating or discussions will be allowed. This is of course, delivered with some humor; however, it sets the tone for the class and is a reference point when conversations start. The contextual sense that I have found to be easy for students to grasp and refer to is that of holding a subject up and examining it from all angles. The subject matter is pictured as a sphere, where all angles are equal, being held up for the whole class to explore. This demonstrates the equality of everyone's views as well as the need for everyone to contribute in order to complete the sphere. During the succeeding weeks this picture is presented at the beginning of every conversation and as a tool to bring conversations back to dialogues when they stray toward discussion or debate. Here are some simple ground rules to establish on the first night:

1. The purpose of dialogue is to understand and learn from one another. You cannot "win" a dialogue
2. All dialogue participants speak for themselves, not as representatives of groups or special interests
3. Treat everyone in a dialogue as an equal: leave role, status and stereotypes at the door
4. Be open and listen to others even when you disagree; try not to rush to judgment
5. Search for assumptions (especially your own)
6. Look for common ground
7. Keep dialogue and decision-making separate (dialogue comes first) (Viewpoint Learning, 2012).

Prior to each class, the facilitator needs to prepare some questions to be used during dialogue to help clarify the conversation and keep it on track. These should be used to guide the conversation utilizing the Socratic method of questioning (Futter, 2011), which forces students to expand their views and open their minds to new knowledge and understanding. Once a conversation is underway, the key action that the facilitator has to focus on is listening. Intently listening ties the facilitator with the students and creates the feeling that everyone is learning together.

6.   **The Need for Trust**.

It is easy for Facilitators of adult education who practice the theory of andragogy to overlook the need of establishing trust before entering a classroom dialogue. While they have advanced degrees, they are focused in their area of expertise and most lack the educational background of trained educators. Since they are successful in their various careers, there is a normal assumption that students will listen and believe every thing they say. Rader & Summerville however; "argue that the essential pre-requisite for classroom dialogue is an atmosphere of trust" (n.d., para. 1) "Building trust in the classroom means that sometimes "dialogue" has to wait and the instructor needs to be patient in trying to get the students to believe that you, and their classmates, are really open to dialogue" (para. 2) . Ken LaVigne, a high school teacher in the Whittier Union High School District, uses a simple example to aid in establishing trust while explaining the basic concept of dialogue. He has his class sit in a circle and he stands in the middle and asks the class to imagine that he is blind and has never been in the classroom before. Students are then asked to describe only what the can see without turning their heads. The descriptions of the room are very different; and yet every answer is correct depending on the view each student has (Lavigne, 2012). This graphically demonstrates the idea of dialogue and how every student's observation is not only correct, but their view of the subject is needed to get a complete picture of the room.

7.   **A Practical Example of Dialogue**

There are many subjects that are uncomfortable for facilitators to introduce into classroom conversations because they are considered too controversial or can alienate some students. One of these is *prejudice*. This is a word that stirs emotions, especially in those students from minority cultures and ethnic groups. For those facilitating ethics or communication courses, the easy way out is to either ignore the existence of prejudice or to make a blanket statement and move on. Entering into a classroom conversation is not a course of action that will often spawn great understanding if discussion is used as the conversational tool. The use of dialogue on the other hand, can be used to allow the students to embrace prejudice as a natural part of humanity and then move to understand how it fits and affects their environment. The conversation might start something like this:

Facilitator: A word that has been at the forefront of media when discussing racial relations is prejudice. What are your thoughts on that word?

At this point, some students will shrink back in their seats and show signs of discomfort while others will voice opinions that usually follow what would be expected; that prejudice is wrong and should not be tolerated. After all of the students have had an opportunity to respond, the facilitator continues:

Facilitator: How many of you like the color red and think it is your favorite color?

Facilitator: How many of you like the color blue and think it is your favorite color?

The facilitator continues until most of the students have responded.

Facilitator: Then are some of you prejudiced against blue because you prefer red, and some prejudiced against red because you like blue? Does preferring one thing over another denote prejudice?

With this opening conversation real dialogue can begin because the word prejudice has now been moved from something bad to something more natural. To begin to move the conversation deeper into the idea of varying perspectives, the facilitator might make a statement.

Facilitator: I have the cutest great granddaughters on the planet; nobody else's even come close, and I want to spend my time playing with them rather than my friend's great granddaughters. Is this a form of prejudice?

By following this line of questioning, the class conversations can begin to flow into areas such as why ethnic groups prefer to live in the same areas, how culture affects individual action, or what constitutes right and wrong. By removing the stigma from the word prejudice and allowing students to see that everyone is prejudiced about something and that it is acceptable, the outcome of the conversation yields openness to prejudice and an understanding that the real culprit is how individuals respond to their prejudices. This is a key understanding in any ethics class; bad behavior is not driven by prejudice but by discriminatory actions. Through the use of dialogue, a subject that might be omitted from class conversation is opened to reveal a rich knowledge that when viewed from many different angles provides students with answers to their own feelings as well as a bases for developing global understanding.

8. Conclusion

The use of dialogue as a learning tool cannot only solve some of the more difficult classroom situations; it also opens the learning process and helps students understand the multi-faceted world they live in. As the group explores new perspectives, which brings the subject closer to home and demonstrates its relevance to each student, those who may not possess knowledge or even interest in the subject will be inspired to actively participate.

"Creating dialogue in the classroom is about creating trust; it is about thoughtful and critical analysis of each contribution; it is about connecting theoretical ideas to practical considerations; and it is about helping students to think about their citizenship both within and outside the classroom"(Rader & Summerville, n.d., p. 7).

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