

A Shambhala Introduction to Dialogue from dian marie hosking

Why a dialogical way of working fits for us Shambhala/Buddhist practitioners...

Transformative change work with individuals, families and organisations is increasingly grounded in a “relational” - or dialogical - view of person and processes. In this view, persons - rather than being seen as stable, bounded, separately existing entities (what VCTR called “this and that” thinking) - are seen as always arising in processes of relating to other persons and to the world more generally. The term “dialogical” refers to the co-arising (in Buddhism, *pratityasamutpada*) of self and other and their relations. Here we can already see parallels with buddhist teachings.

Those who follow the work of theoretical physicist David Bohm, or who work in family therapy and cybernetics, also speak of “dialogue” as a *slow, open and curious way of relating* characterised:

- a) by a very special sort of listening, questioning, and being present
- b) by a willingness to suspend one’s assumptions and certainties, and
- c) by reflexive attention to the ongoing process and one’s own part in it.

For Bohm, dialogical processes allow participants to “take part in truth.” His world view is *participative* - it is participative consciousness that allows people to understand the whole - a view found reflected in Reason and Torbert’s talk of practical, participative knowing or participative consciousness (Reason, 1994; Reason and Torbert, 2000) and in their development of “participative action research (PAR). What these approaches share is their intention to open up ‘power to’ rather than close down through ‘power over’. They tend to work:

- a) through slowing down speedy thoughts and conversations,
- b) by providing space to ‘listen to our listening’, to see and look at our assumptions and ‘this and that’ thinking, and to reflect on the ‘how’ of the relational processes we are part of
- c) through non-judgemental (appreciative?) curiosity
- d) multiple conversations, rather than single-voiced leadership edicts and the avoidance of talk and discussion;
- e) with what is already (potentially) available (in Buddhism, ‘you have all you need’),
- f) by inviting and support many lines of action, rather than requiring or imposing consensus or consent.

Indeed, you could say that dialogue work could be seen as a kind of collective, verbalised shamatha/vipassana - which can allow a new kind of “coherent, collective intelligence” to emerge (Bohm, Factor and Garrett, 1991).