

European Conference 2014
**"1914-2014: Lessons from History?
Citizenship Education and Conflict Management"**

16-18 October 2014
Vienna, Austria

Workshop 2
"Dialogue and citizenship education: Conceptual and practical approaches"

By Sigrid Peuker
Training · Consulting · Moderation (Germany)

The workshop consisted of five main parts:

1. Bohmian dialogue and why it is suited for citizenship education
2. How the approach is used in the project "Dialogue at School" in Germany
3. Core principles - training units with the participants
4. 'Trial' dialogue with the participants
5. Debriefing

Part 1 - Bohmian Dialogue

DIALOGUE is inseparably linked with the human being: our identity and social cohesion can only be generated through dialogue. Thus, dialogue not only has a personal and social, but also a political dimension. Dialogue has been playing an important role in the development of conflict mediation methods and in peace studies for a number of decades. One of the best-known dialogic approaches originated with the physicist David Bohm (1917 - 1992). His approach is to provide a space in which participants are encouraged to freely express the most diverse viewpoints on complex, controversial topics. Out of the diversity of voices and perceptions and the recognition of differences, new solutions for joint actions can then be created.

David Bohm

David Bohm was born 1917 in the US as first son of a Jewish family. He died near London in 1992 as a world-famous professor and researcher of quantum physics.

Throughout his personal life and his professional career as a theoretical physicist, David Bohm was deeply concerned about the fragmentation of society as a whole and science in particular. When working in quantum physics, he realized that „in spite of claims to pursue 'truth', scientific endeavour was often infected with personal ambition, a rigid defence of theory, and the weight of tradition – all at the expense of creative participation toward the common goal of science. Based in part on such observations, he frequently remarked that the general lot of mankind was caught in a similar web of contradictory intentions and actions.

These contradictions, he felt, lead not only to bad science, but to all variety of social and personal fragmentation.¹

These fragmentations erect boundaries between people, groups or nations, which are difficult to overcome and are one main reason for problems and conflict.

In his effort to find ways to overcome fragmentations, Bohm was seeking ways, which permit to include different worldviews. Applying his quantum physics view of reality, he described the world as an 'unbroken flowing whole', where diversity was a necessary aspect of a larger whole, but each part by itself incomplete. Solutions should be based on bringing together as many aspects of a topic as possible, thus widening our view and seeing more of its complexity.

At the beginning of the 80s he started to investigate these topics with a group of colleagues and interested partners. In one of their meetings „A dialogue developed in which each participant was able to put aside his own views and listen to those of others. It became increasingly clear that no point of view was in itself complete, and that a collective process of thought was the means by which understanding could be enriched. This fact became the focus of the group's attention. No conclusions were reached nor were any programmes initiated; rather the appreciation of a continual unfoldment of new insights revealed through friendly conversation was seen to be the means by which an increase of harmony might appear.“²

From that time on David Bohm continued to work on this form of dialogue, and when he died in 1992 there were already several dialogue groups established.

What is a Bohmian dialogue?

Although the term 'dialogue' is familiar to all of us, it's meaning is very broad. Dialogue comes from Greek 'dia' = 'through' and 'logos' = 'the word' or 'meaning'. So dialogue is a flow of meaning.

„Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to the possibilities that result simply from being in a relationship with others – possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred.“³

The goal of Bohemian Dialogue goes far beyond mere communication and sharing of worldviews. It tries to explore the assumptions, which determine our lives, our 'mental maps', which so often lead to automatic reactions in thinking, talking and doing.

So Bohemian Dialogue has two main goals:

1. Explore one's own thinking processes with preconceptions, prejudices and characteristic patterns which lie behind our own thoughts, opinions, beliefs and feelings.
2. Sharing insights, knowledge, or opinions in a way, which enlarges one's own perspective and fosters shared meaning.

Thus „dialogue is a testing ground for the limits of assumed knowledge [and] offers the possibility of an entirely new order of communication and relationship with ourselves, our fellows, and the world we inhabit.“⁴ And this, I think, is something necessary in citizenship education: Knowing oneself and the cultural, societal, familial and so on influences on our world views, and being aware that there are other life experiences that lead to other world views, and that we have to communicate about that in order to better understand our life and environment, so we can make better decisions. Not in the dialogue, but afterwards.

¹ Bohm (1997) p viii, Foreword from Lee Nichols

² Bohm (2005) p xii, Foreword from Donald Factor

³ William Isaacs (1999) p 19

⁴ David Bohm (1997) p xvii, Foreword from Lee Nichols

To make it clear: The goal of Bohmian Dialogue is not to make decisions or initiate actions. This can arise out of a dialogue. But making decisions or initiating actions has a much better basis when preceded by dialogue.

Feedback from participants

After the input there was a short discussion about a distinction between dialogue as a method for education and as an approach for a political crisis. This was a big concern especially for those participants coming from crises regions. As dialogue has to do with respect and the willingness to listen, it may be difficult to apply it in a crisis, especially in times of protracted or violent conflict situations and regression. It was discussed how this could be overcome in the long run. Solutions could be to pick out those members of the conflicting parties who are willing to lead a dialogue, in order to take it back into their groups, convincing their colleagues to try out this form of encounter and interaction, eventually. Some parallels of Bohmian dialogue to contemporary intercultural approaches were seen. It was suggested to start with dialogue in young children's education, as at a young age children are more open and don't have fixed listening or speaking habits. This was defined as long-term actions in civic education.

Part 2 - Bohmian Dialogue at Dialogue at School

Dialogue at School, in German 'Dialog macht Schule', is a programme initiated by the Federal Agency for Civic Education and the Robert Bosch Stiftung. Its claim is „The mentoring programme for schools in an immigration society“. It brings together personal development, civic education and integration. University students, most of them with immigration background, are trained to become tutors of a learning process and will accompany students from 7th grade on in weekly sessions over a period of 2-3 years.⁵

Before they start, the tutors get training in dialogue, citizenship education, learning processes and youth and school. We call these tutors 'dialogue facilitators', because they create a space in which students are motivated to exchange perspectives, learn about themselves and about their classmates, strengthen self-efficacy and skills for participation, clear up misunderstandings or develop strategies for solving conflicts.

Building up a good and trustful relationship with students is the starting point, as in order to express thoughts and feelings that are usually kept hidden; it needs increasing trust in a group and in the process itself. Building up relationships can last up to half a year, depending on the school form or class or how the dialogue facilitator gets access to the students.

When the relationship has been built up, topics and issues that are particularly important to the students will be identified, and suitable methods are chosen. Topics usually derive from the living environment of the students. Some examples of the issues that are important for the students are identity, integration, mobbing, sexuality and much more. Current news which are prominent in the media do have a significant influence on the choice.

Bohmian Dialogue gives the necessary space for development, as it is not a fixed method but kind of an inner attitude, which determines the relationship between dialogue facilitators and students. It is not only regular circles, where all students can feel secure enough to speak out, where dialogue is applied. Dialogue at School works with different methods and

⁵ <http://www.dialogmachtschule.de/en/idea/>

exercises, but at their core lies the dialogic attitude. It is characterized by mutual respect, the willingness to really listen to others and to oneself, the ability to find and speak one's own voice and the constant effort to suspend judgements.

The task of the dialogue facilitators is a very complex and demanding one. There are at least two levels, which have to be taken into consideration. The first is the content. The dialogue facilitators need to know something about the topic itself. It is not necessary that they are experts, but they should know at least important facts and actors. The second level is the level on which citizenship educational learning takes place. Which means that by working together about a certain topic in the group, skills for participation can be developed. Students must learn to inform themselves, they have to consider several positions and perspectives, they have to get the bigger picture of a topic and be able to observe in a differentiated manner at the same time, and based on their observation they have to describe different actions and behaviour thus getting more insights into a topic.

As the programme is quite successful, it is expanding to other cities in Germany. Dialogue at School is currently active in Berlin, Stuttgart, Wuppertal, and Hannover and soon will start in Hamburg.

Feedback from participants

The programme was assumed very inspiring, more information was asked for and if it could be transferred to other countries.

Part 3 - Core principles of dialogue – Input and exercises

Listening

Goal: Experiencing a) how thoughts and feelings are interconnected and that thinking processes and judgements are mainly subconscious, b) that many interpretations are possible based on the same information but different world views and life experiences, c) how a much broader picture of a topic can be seen when different perspectives are taken into consideration.

Exercise: All participants sit in a circle. A short story⁶ is read. Participants are given two tasks:

1. Listen to the content of the story
2. Observe own thinking process: Which thoughts or feelings came up during listening?
3. Reflect in the group about experiences.

Speaking one's voice

Goal: To understand that participating has to do with allowing voices to speak out and be heard as well as with getting involved oneself. Therefore participants experiment with initiating conversations, practicing appreciation, contributing and building relationships.

Exercise: See video on the NECE website.⁷

⁶ How the monkeys saved the fish, traditional Tanzanian folktale, <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-by-season/14-animal-stories/67-how-the-monkeys-saved-the-fish.html>

⁷ <http://blog.nece.eu/node/272>

Respect

Goal: Starting a discourse about 'respect' with as many views and aspects as possible. Bring awareness to the broadness of possible experiences, views or opinions and the variety of aspects.

Exercise: Each person gets a sheet of paper and a pen. They write questions about respect on the paper, bring their questions together and get into conversation about them.

Part 4 - 'Trial' Dialogue

The dialogue process, how it is widely used was presented: Participants sit in a circle; a talking stick or talking stone is used to make it easier to stay in one's role as listener; a check in- round was held in the beginning.

Topic of the dialogue was „Where can I use/apply dialogue in my work?“

Some of the topics during the dialogue:

- Dialogue can be applied in almost every situation: In organizations when negotiating or interacting with colleagues (round tables, teambuilding, lunch breaks), in schools or universities, in private situations, at home and with friends...
- When we are in professional situations, we listen, but when at home, dialogue is difficult.
- Even in dialogue there is a hierarchy, because there are different educational levels and personalities.
- Intimacy versus public – we wear masks in public.
- I believe in the idea of dialogue, but wonder how to connect it with citizenship education: Concrete action in society as a whole? For example in civil rights movement: How would dialogue change something, when legal aspects are not changed?
- Dialogue has to be combined with decision-making: In dialogue we zoom out, how do we zoom in again?
- How to learn the necessary skills (listening, speaking one's voice)? Students should learn it, as these are basic skills.

Part 5 – Debriefing

In the debriefing part of the workshop some of the participants spoke about experiences with other forms of dialogue, which they already apply. Others talked about their considerations, for example that they find it worth trying not to judge others. Some spoke about their experiences during the exercises and the dialogue, for example that they were surprised how powerful it is to listen to others. It was explained that dialogue in the Arab world is associated with listening, but unfortunately shouting is predominant.

A historical conclusion was made by stating that 10 years ago dialogue was associated with tolerance, but that there has to be more, as dialogue starts with a desire to have a dialogue, then comes respect and then the skills. The idea was brought in that sometimes a third part is needed to facilitate at least the rules. And as there are different kinds of dialogue, it should be possible to adopt relevant rules, which make a dialogue successful in a specific situation.

The question arose, if dialogue is an end or a means, a tool or a step.

It was called for more dialogues, but warned of 'facipulation', meaning that in a dialogue manipulation of participants through inputs of the facilitators or settings should be avoided.

It was asked - as 'devil's advocate' -, if not societies often have evolved out of confrontation.

Recommendations

- As a long term action in civic education young children should learn dialogue skills.
- Beware of 'facipulation'! (Manipulation of participants through inputs of the facilitators or settings should be avoided.)
- Bohmian dialogue is one tool among others, we need other tools for different tasks and situations.
- In times of protracted or violent conflict situations and regression dialogue may not be possible.

References

David Bohm, Donald Factor and Peter Garrett (1991). Dialogue - A Proposal. www.david-bohm.net/dialogue/dialogue_proposal.html [14th October 2014]

David Bohm (1997). On Dialogue. Edited by Lee Nichols. London, Routledge.

David Bohm (2005 digital Print, first published 1985). Unfolding Meaning. A Weekend of Dialogue. Abingdon, Routledge.

Dialog macht Schule / Dialogue at School - <http://www.dialogmachtschule.de/en/idea/>

William Isaacs (1999). Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life. New York, Random House.

How the monkeys saved the fish, Traditional Tanzanian folktale,
<http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-by-season/14-animal-stories/67-how-the-monkeys-saved-the-fish.html>