



CONTEMPLATIVE DIALOGUE

*A Transformational Psychotherapeutic Practice with
Tools for Enhancing Client Relationships*

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My Journey with Contemplative Dialogue

History:

- First became aware of CD in 2013
- Attended a 4 day workshop in Canada with Canadian Govt participants (core competency) – facilitated by Steven Wirth (founder of CS Practice)
- Sponsored a 3 day workshop in 2015 with my leadership team (and Steve) at a manufacturing company in East Berlin, Ct
- Participated in a 6 month practicum to gain further understanding in this practice
- After retirement, in 2016, I continue to practice CD in everyday circumstances including some post retirement work as a retirement home and hospice chaplain.

My observations:

- This practice requires no special place or time or condition.
- There are no levels in this work to be achieved, only more awareness (especially of myself) and the quality of my presence with others
- There is no failure.... just keep practicing. Learn from my shortfalls in the practice.
- It can bring a sense of freedom I am not bound by my own assumptions and opinions and judgments
- When I'm not practicing it, I realize (in hindsight) that my unconscious reactions (especially in conflict) took over

What Contemplative Dialogue is and isn't

- It is not something that comes naturally - we are conditioned to react.
 - It is personal, inner work
 - It is not about winning, losing, or avoiding
 - It is about the ability to connect and to share meaning with another
 - It is not about being manipulative or defensive
 - It is about integrity, humility, inquiry, advocacy, and presence (being curious) / a sense of not knowing
 - It is not always reciprocated –not a requirement of this practice
 - It can bring about a connection
 - It is not about objectifying the “other”.
 - It is about a great knowing that there is a common humanity / oneness with everyone deep within
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- *To move forward , to save the world, we must intentionally stay in relationship with others, curious about them, and at least try to understand their experience and perspective,” TALK MATTERS, Pg. 173 Mary Gelinis*

Benefits and Relevancy

BENEFITS

- It can provide us more freedom to decide how we react or not react/ the ability to pause and to notice.
- Greater awareness of our own subconscious reactions and filters
- Less defensiveness resulting in more opportunity for connection

RELEVANCY

- Need for this is all around us!
- Helps in maintaining important relationships independent of different views and opinions. (i.e.. families have been torn apart based on different ideologies, preferences, etc.)
- Provides opportunity to test our own assumptions and to help test others.

Agenda

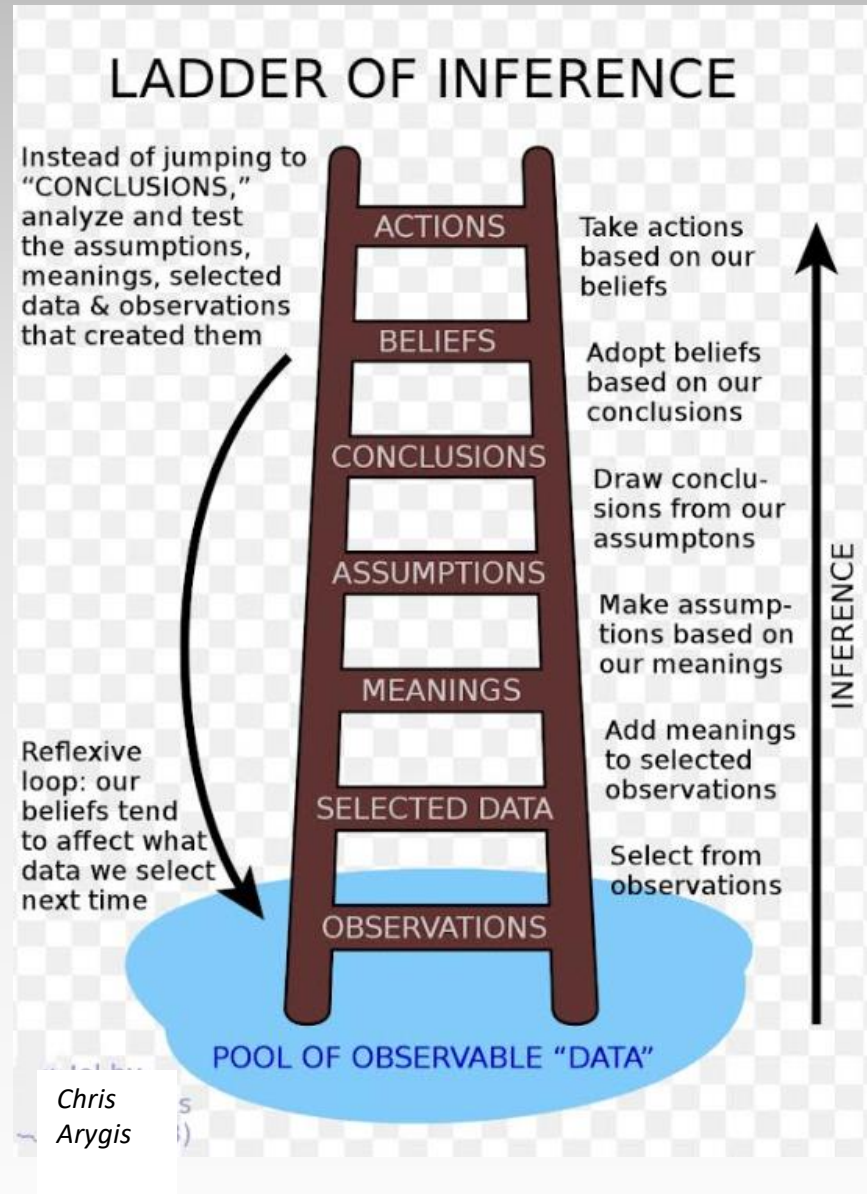
- INTRODUCTION
- FOUR COMPONENTS OF CONTEMPLATIVE DIALOGUE
- COMPONENTS – ONE AND TWO
- BREAK – 15 minutes
- COMPONENTS - THREE AND FOUR
- SUMMARY / QUESTIONS

The Four Components of Dialogue

- 1) **Becoming self-aware of how we make meaning** and form opinions.
- 2) **Engage with an intent to understand and connect** instead of winning them over to your point or simply avoiding conflict.
- 3) **Cultivating Authentic Presence** - seeking clarity and a deeper understanding.
- 4) **Be mindful** of your own emotional reactions, the reactions of the other person and the dynamics of the conversation.

COMPONENT ONE:

Becoming self-aware of how we make meaning.



Unfortunately, when we interact with others, we're often unaware of what's going on within and among the people in our immediate environment. From here, especially if we get disturbed, it's easy to start functioning on automatic. This reactive mode doesn't leave room for awareness or conscious choice TALK MATTERS Pg 77

Ladder of Inference

“We do not see things as *they* are, we see things as *we* are.”

- Actions
- Beliefs
- Conclusions
- Assumptions
- Meanings
- Selected Data
- Observations / Data



*The most dangerous thing in the world is to think
you understand something.*

-Zen Saying

COMPONENT TWO:

*Engage with an
intent to
understand and to
connect.*

Focus moves from “winning” to *understanding with the intention for connection.*

- No other agenda (i.e. winning, avoidance)

Qualities:

1. Driven by *curiosity* not defensiveness
 - Invites inquiry of another’s position as well as my own
 - Sincerity especially in inquiries
 - Speaking to “higher self” of the other – can be difficult!
 - Not looking to finding fault in the other’s logic/facts to discredit
2. Requires *integrity*
 - Telling the truth with compassion
 - Revealing your own assumptions and info sources
 - Seeing your own blindspots
 - Creating a space for connection
3. Requires real, *active listening*

Our dialogue with one another can become a transformational act – a connection despite not agreeing.

“One of the keys to successful dialogue is engaging with genuine curiosity and a desire to learn about different perspectives and how people came to them. This can occur only when people feel safe and are able to listen with an honest desire to understand.” Talk Matters, Mary Gelinis pg. 132

Active Listening

- Ask Probing and open ended questions
- Mirroring – through facial expressions and gestures
- Encouraging – with words, sounds, noises
- Echoing – asking for additional detail, clarification
- Reflecting – specify feelings
- Re-stating – what the speaker said (beware of inflection)

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” Stephen Covey

“Listening is being able to be changed by the other person.” Alan Alda

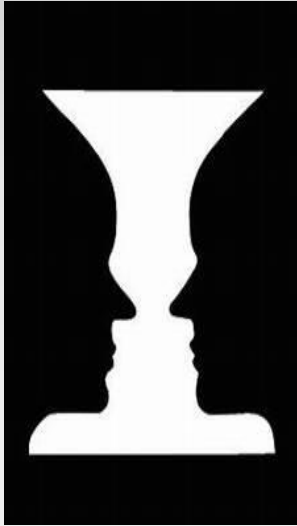
“Many of us have the habit of listening to what others say and quickly agreeing or disagreeing with it. Listening is not the same as agreeing or disagreeing. That is a different step. When we listen to others, we pay full attention to them and what they are saying.” TALK MATTERS. P. 183

...”we can imagine stepping behind their eyes for a moment to see the situation from their vantage point. We might directly ask, “How did you come to see the situation this way? Please help me understand your perspectives or concerns.” A corollary question to ask yourself is “What might this person need.?” TALK MATTERS, p.181

Reflection

- What resonates with you regarding the first two components?
- What are the obstacles and benefits of “engaging with the intent to understand and connect?”

BREAK



What do you see?



It's hard to hold opposing views together at the same time.

Even when we are able to hold them, we hold them differently.

COMPONENT THREE:

Cultivating Authentic Presence

- **Put aside the desire to change the other person to your point of view**
 - How am I showing up in this encounter?
 - Have I decided who is right and wrong?
- **Pause and Notice what is real in this discussion**
 - Non- defended stance
 - Take a long, compassionate look / Notice
 - Notice my feelings or situation in a compassionate or unhurried way
 - Notice defended energies..."what did I need to defend?" "What was I afraid of?"
- **Move from judging others to understanding their POV and what went into forming it.**
 - Seek clarity and deeper understanding / explore LOI
 - Explore their Ladder of Inference
 - Listen without preparing for the next argument
 - Look for Core Values that are common?
- **Focus on Process vs. Content**
- **Die to the outcome**
 - Not preoccupied with my agenda
 - No pre -expectations

Important Reminder

Engaging in dialogue doesn't mean I accept or condone what I don't or can't agree with, it simply means that I pause to genuinely listen in order to begin to understand the other person's perspective.

In this practice, I allow myself to be open to be affected by the other person's point of view.

"The dread of being open to the ideas of others generally comes from our hidden insecurity about our own convictions. On the other hand, if we find that viewing things from a basically different perspective of that of our adversary, we discover our own truth in a new light and are able to understand our own ideal more realistically." Thomas Merton

COMPONENT FOUR:

*Being Mindful of ours
and others emotional
and physical reactions*

- Requires Inner Awareness, Compassion and Humility
- Notice emotional and physical responses and what triggered them
 - Do you encounter Dissonance in yourself or in the other person?
 - Opportunities for honest exploration
- Notice the shift into connection

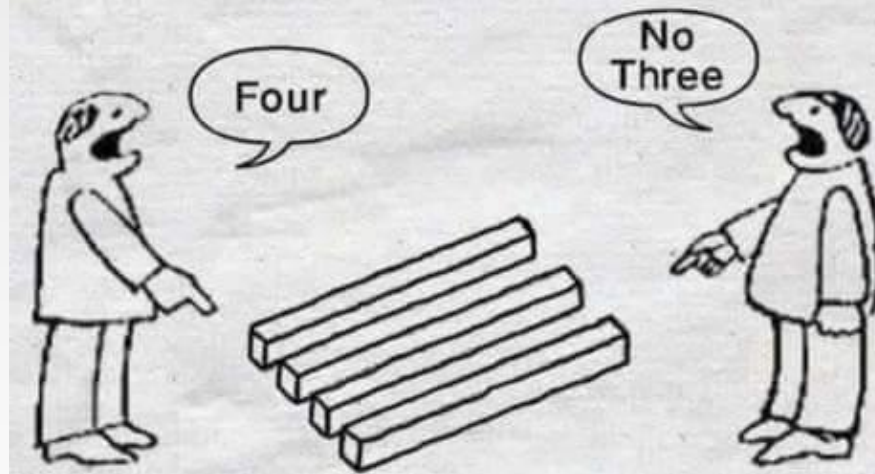
“When we’re self aware , meaning that we’re conscious and noticing our own body sensations, thoughts, and emotions, we can pick up on the “messages” about what might be going on with others by paying attention to what’s going on inside us. This doesn’t mean we understand the cause of their upset; it just means that we can recognize when they’re in a state of distress. “ (TALK MATTERS, Pg 142

Key Reminders - Contemplative Dialogue

- We do not see things as *they* are, we see things as *we* are.
- How am I **showing up** in this conversation/ encounter?
- Take a **long compassionate look** at the real / Notice
- Create a space for **connection** - Listen without judgment
- **Pause**
- Be **curious** of the other
- Reduce and be **aware of your own blind spots**
- Speak to the “**higher self**” of the other - recognizing the other as “sacred mystery”
- Tell the **Truth with Compassion**
- Focus on **Process vs. Content**
- Die to the **outcome**
- Keep trying... it is a **process**

**"Everything we hear
is an opinion, not a fact.
Everything we see
is a perspective, not the truth."**

- Marcus Aurelius





*...the deepest level of **communication** is not communication, but **communion**. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers (and sisters), **we are already one**. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. **What we have to be is what we (already) are.***

Thomas Merton address to Interreligious conference in Calcutta India on October 23, 1968

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS

Thank you!

Ladder of Inference

NOTICE - noticing your own movement up and down your ladder

- Recognize the steps
- Unpack the personal and social filters that MIGHT be influencing you
- Be curious about subtle or unconsciously held assumptions that influence you

NAME - name the steps you take moving up the ladder so that others can understand your thinking.

- Name the concrete detail you notice and responded to.
- Explain what meaning you make of it at each step up your ladder.
- Pause and invite clarification or different meanings that may add to your assumptions
- Be open to new information and allow it to influence your thinking

RESPECTIVELY EXPLORE - Learn to help someone else safely unpack their movement up and down their own ladder

- Practice asking in respectful ways that make it safe for the other
- Seek understanding rather than to “correct or convert” the other.
- Find the wording that works for you .

◦ **ADVOCACY / REFLECTION / INQUIRY**

Example: *“It is important to me that I don’t misunderstand you and then think I know your experience and be mistaken. Is it okay if I ask questions sometimes to be sure I clearly understand your experience. I don’t want to prove you wrong or something, it’s just to be clear so we know we’re talking about the same thing or not. “*

Wirth 2019