

## **Building Learning Communities Using Dialogue in Educational Conference: A Case Study of Dialogue method of paper presentation**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents an idea of Creation of Learning Communities based on case study of “Dialogue in conference” as a different method of paper presentation. Dialogue that has been used for study had been propagated by Late Prof. Dr. B.K.Passi, (Patron of All India Association of Educational Research) through seminars and workshops. This method is adopted from David Bohm’s model and help building cooperative, constructive and concrete learning and sharing environment for everyone.*

**Key Words:** Learning Community, Dialogue and Educational Conference

### **Introduction**

The idea of Dialogue method of paper presentation was first introduced by Prof. Dr B.K.Passi , and practiced at conferences held at various places. Researcher found it very innovative and did this case study on process of the dialogue method of paper presentation in conference to understand the concept and its merits.

Dialogue is focused conversation, engaged in intentionally with the goal of increasing understanding, addressing problems, and thoughts or actions. It engages the participant wholeheartedly. It is different from ordinary, everyday conversation; in this process dialogue has a focus and a purpose. Dialogue, unlike debate or even discussion, is as interested in the relationship(s) between the participants as it is in the topic or theme being explored. Ultimately, real dialogue presupposes an openness to modify deeply held convictions. The focus on inquiry (curiosity and questioning) is crucial to Bohm’s conception of dialogue. Bohm’s emphasis is different from Socratic questioning in that no “truth” is assumed and different from Freire in that Bohm’s work is more in the realm of ideas

than practice. In addition, Freire's crucial perspective on power is absent in Bohm. Through questioning and wondering together in Bohm's dialogue, those engaged in dialogue attempt to grasp the whole story and by doing so they transform subject/object relations into relationships of partnership.

### **Definition of Key Words:**

**Learning Community** is a group of people who share common academic goals and attitudes, who meet semi-regularly to collaborate on class work.

**Dialogue**, is a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people, and a literary and theatrical form that depicts such an exchange.

**Educational Conference**, A platform for researchers to present and discuss their work together, conferences provide an important channel for exchange of information between researchers.

### **Literature Review**

*David Bohm (1917–1992)* is the most well-known scientist in the field of dialogue. He defined dialogue as “a free flow of meaning among all the participants.” The focus on inquiry (curiosity and questioning) is crucial to Bohm's conception of dialogue. *Weisbord & Janoff (1995)* quote Bohm's concept of a “common pool” of meaning created when people listen to one another – “what they say becomes a part of you, whether you like it or not”. *Margaret Wheatley (Wheatley in Weisbord et al, 1992)* with *Future Search and Dialogue*, descriptions of Café Conversations included references to something larger than the individuals making up the group – Wheatley (in *Brown, 2005*) calls it “discovering collective wisdom”. The descriptions she quotes (“the magic in the middle”; “something coming to life in the middle of the table”) are very reminiscent of quotes from people who have experienced Bohmian dialogue. It is intriguing to see that this experience can be generated by a host of small conversations as well as one large scale dialogue.

**Learning Community** has always been a conversed topic among education fraternity. *Dufour (2004)* notes “people use this term to describe every possible combination of individuals with an interest in education” (p. 31). Some experts offer a more focused look. Where community exists, according to *Gardner (1989)*, it “confers on its members identity, a sense of belonging, and a measure of security” (p. 73). He suggests that ideals of justice and compassion are nurtured in communities such as they

were in an earlier era when personal support came not only from one's family but also from an extended family or the community. Those who seek to build community today hope that it embodies the best of contemporary values, is inclusive, balances individual freedom and group obligation, fosters the release of human potential, and invites sharing and participation in leadership tasks (Apple & Beane, 1995).

### **Dialogue mode of paper presentation**

Prof B.K.Passi being father of this method has given a n idea to present paper in dialogue mode ([www.samwaad.in](http://www.samwaad.in)) Academic cycles starts with Title cycle followed by IQ (immediate questions), stands for asking instant questions. If the co-group members do not understand any of the concepts, words or phrases used, then they can immediately ask the instant question for clarifications to one and all, with CCC (compare / contrast /create) required to compare and contrast his/her title with that of the paper titles of other group member(s). During this process of comparing and contrasting one may get a new insight based on group deliberations and may create a fresh title. A similar process followed for objectives, hypothesis, and research questions. Next cycle is Methodology cycle in which everyone needs to dialogue with IQ,CCC and gets advancement in their efforts, Last one the Conclusion cycle is for Recommendations and to discover “We findings” to get best points for implementation and to offer suggestions for conference. There is no leader an external facilitator presents in the beginning, but the group takes control in course of time. Listening to the others, Connect to others and reflect to others is the key of dialogue. Participants share their Knowledge, experiences, views& ideas about their papers/articles. No one unduly dominates nor does anyone remain unduly passive. Dialogue is not discussion, nor a debate. During this process one don't think who is right. But what is right.

### **Objectives of the study:-**

To know how the process of Dialogue method of paper presentation facilitates in building learning communities in conference on contrary of the just paper presentation

### **Methodology:-**

**Sample:** The study is a participant-observer case study and included repeated close observations over a year of period with various groups in different conferences where the dialogue method of paper presentation was adapted as mode of paper presentation. Observation was conducted during the

conference session; Participants were engaged in different groups of '8' members. Participants had been with their papers/articles for dialogue and their dialogue session was lasted four hours. Interviews were conducted after their consent.

**Tools and Technique:** The study is a participant-observer case study. Author followed participant-observer method in this study because it allows for in-depth information to be gathered about the case, which provides thick descriptions. Author participated in same and collected data by observation with structured and unstructured interviews from different participants. The study was not bounded by time and place. Author spent a lot of time describing the context or setting for the study, and used multiple sources of information to provide the detailed, in-depth picture of the member's actions, interactions, and responses in order to determine the role of their capacities play in creating the learning community.

Author conducted individual semi structured interviews. The interview was guided by a list of questions whose wording and order are only loosely determined before the interview. This structure facilitates an investigator's ability to respond appropriately to the situation, to new ideas about the subject, and to the emerging view of the participant.

#### **Procedure:**

Author used an inductive approach to data analysis because this orientation enabled them to treat human activity and social action as *text* that may be viewed as a collection of symbols describing layers of meaning. That they used to understand the implementation & process of learning community. Pattern-matching is major mode of case analysis. This type of logic compares an empirical pattern with a predicted one. Author crossed check the data gathered from participants and from observation to the traits of a learning community what has given by **Ludwig-Hardman's (2003)** in comprehensive review of the learning-community literature; He identified seven features that seem to facilitate its creation:

- 1) **Shared goals;**
- 2) **Safe and supportive conditions;**
- 3) **Collective identity;**
- 4) **Collaboration;**

**5) Respectful inclusion;****6) Progressive discourse toward knowledge building; and****7) Mutual appropriation.**

The Matrix Analysis used to analyze data to determine how diverse factors relate to one another and to classify items by identifying key characteristics frequent to all items.

**Results and discussions**

How dialogue method of paper presentation helps developing learning communities among participants has been described according to the traits of a learning community. Ludwig-Hardman's (2003) has given comprehensive review of the learning-community literature; He identified seven features that seem to facilitate its creation and author based their findings on above said standards to find out a resemblance linking learning community and dialogue process. For design purposes, the seven features outlined above served as an organizing framework for aimed at establishing learning community in dialogue process. Traits of learning communities and supportive findings of dialogue process are being illustrated here as they are defined.

**Shared goals**

A learning community forms, in part, when individuals from multiple perspectives willingly collaborate as a larger collective whole toward a shared goal or vision (*Barab and Duffy, 1998; Palloff and Pratt, 1998; Senge, 2000*). “The sense of shared community requires that the participants be sympathetic to the ideas around which the group is based; even if they disagree, there needs to be some fundamental common ground” (*Donath, 1999, p. 31*). When members of a community share goals there is a greater desire to participate in activities and to contribute to the group's goals (*Wilson, 2001*). Present research assigned a task to different groups to complete a new research as “we findings”, with a cooperative and collaborative way for both individual and group to perform equally. By establishing goals for group and rules that mandate interaction and co-dependence, participants’ can develop a shared goal that gives real purpose in collaboration. Members in this process are focused on certain goals they had in common. Presentation and more over the improvement of paper gave everyone a sense of functioning together for something worthwhile.

### Safe and supporting conditions

A learning community provides caring and nurturing conditions that foster the development of trust and respect among the learners (*Coombe, 1999; Retallick, 1999*). This, in turn, encourages risk-taking, the exchange of ideas and feedback, shared responsibility and support for learning and outcomes, and distributed or negotiated control (*Barab and Duffy, 1998; Downes, 1998; Etzioni and Etzioni, 1997; Grabinger and Dunlap, 1996; Hiltz, 1998; Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson, 1999; Lawrence, 1997; Scime, 1994; Wells, 1999*). The role of dialogue process in molding respectful behavior in interactions is important, as it develops variety of interactions between participants. Group members often benefit by participating in establishing and constructing new horizons of knowledge and understandings for group to ensure respectful environment. Participants feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts and ideas. Some of them commented that they felt comfort and at home during the process. This makes the process more adaptable and progressive.

### Community identity

A learning community's identity is largely formed by the community's history or heritage, including the shared goals and belief systems, rules and norms of the community that is reproduced as new generations of members enter the community to assure that it continues to function (*Barab and Duffy, 1998; Scardemalia and Bereiter, 1996*). A shared history also encourages the development of group identity, which enhances reproducibility as new members contribute, support, and eventually lead the community into the future (*Barab, Barnett and Squire, 2000; Barab and Duffy, 2000; Lawrence, 1997*).

The limited nature of contact and interaction in dialogue process can swift affiliation of participants with the group. Participants may identify with the group and see themselves as partners and collaborators. A deeper level of identity establishes as dialogue process grows. Larger contextual factors may also be important, for example, participants' sense of belonging within academic or similar background/subject/fields. Participants enjoy a sense of connection to fulfill their goals which are decided and defined then and there. There is really a feeling of belonging in group environment as they understand each other.

### **Collaboration**

Involvement in a learning community requires high levels of social interaction. *Salomon and Perkins (1998)* state: “learning to learn fundamentally involves learning to learn *from* others, learning to learn *with* others” (p.17). Collaborative online learning communities provide community members the chance to learn from and with others and to contribute to others' learning.

Collaboration in dialogue process is often pleasurable for participants. These stronger bonds forms of collaboration may test a group's coherence, but if the group is successful in their given task of finding ‘we findings’, bonds are strengthened and a true sense of connection established. These learning communities went beyond conference and exchanged their contacts within group.

### **Respectful inclusion**

A learning community values and seeks to accommodate diversity of membership, opinions, and perspectives, along with authentic expression of those perspectives (*Barab and Duffy, 2000; Brown and Campione, 1994; Jonassen, Peck and Wilson, 1999; Reil, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1999; Wellman and Gulia, 1999; Wells, 1999; Wenger, 1998b*). *Dewey (1916)* asserted: *A society which makes provisions for participation . . . of all its members . . . is democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and controls, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder.*

Researcher found that the process accommodate surprisingly to one and all in safe and supportive environment. All individuals started participating fully in collective tasks. Dialogue process makes group a learning centre and enables the members to improve themselves by stretching as much as they can. For example: People who had language problem including those who were not knowing anything or had less knowledge of research paper writing; those who unskilled in their work; and those who were lacking prior knowledge of the subject matter got accepted by group and not much effort it made to help everyone fit in.

### **Progressive discourse toward knowledge building**

*Bereiter (1994)* proposed the term *progressive discourse* to describe the process by which the sharing, questioning, and revising of opinions leads to “a new understanding that everyone involved

agrees is superior to their own previous understanding. Such discourse is based on four commitments that all participants make: a) to work toward common understanding; b) to frame questions and propositions in ways that allow evidence to be brought to bear on them; c) to expand the body of collectively valid propositions; and d) to allow any belief to be subjected to criticism if it will advance the discourse” (*Bereiter, 1994, p. 6*). *Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994)* further indicate that intentional learning is “fundamentally a matter of goals rather than strategies. It is a matter of having knowledge as a goal” (p. 201). It is the active and intentional pursuit of knowledge that distinguishes learning communities from other chance encounters or purely social networks (*Palmer, 1999*). Progressive discourse and intentional knowledge-building both help to differentiate learning communities from communities with other kinds of discourses and performance goals. Participants felt that their questions and discussions helped them build knowledge together. Participants were finally contented with joy to have a fruitful conversation.

### **Mutual appropriation**

*Brown and Campione (1994)* define mutual appropriation as the process by which “learners of all ages and levels of expertise and interests seed the environment with ideas and knowledge that are appropriated by different learners at different rates, according to their needs and to the current state of the zones of proximal development in which they are engaged” (p. 237; *see also Vygotsky, 1978*). Mutual appropriation refers to the bi-directional and reciprocal nature of learning in which members of the community are both learners and teachers (*Butt, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1999*).

Since active participation in a learning community takes time and effort, distance learners must perceive that there is some benefit to be gained from participation in a learning community and that they are getting a “personal return on their investment in the group” (*Wilson and Ryder, 1996; see also Levin, 1995*). *Rogers (1995)* calls this *relative advantage*, a sense that there will be some payoff or benefit to adoption of the new practice. Further, learners that perceive there is a mutual benefit will more likely feel a sense of obligation to “participate in activities and contribute to group goals” (*Wilson, 2001*). Mutual appropriation can provide intrinsic rewards and incentives to members who continue contributing as both learners and teachers within the community.

Learning communities can emerge spontaneously when people find common learning goals and pursue projects and tasks together in pursuit of those goals.

## Conclusion

Dialogue is a focused conversation, engaged in intentionally with the goal of increasing understanding, addressing problems, and questioning thoughts or actions. It engages the heart as well as the mind. It is different from ordinary, everyday conversation, in that dialogue has a focus and a purpose. Dialogue is different from debate, which offers two points of view with the goal of proving the legitimacy or correctness of one of the viewpoints over the other. Dialogue, unlike debate or even discussion, is as interested in the relationship(s) between the participants as it is in the topic or theme being explored. Dialogue consist a constructivist approach to learning that recognizes the key importance of interactions with others, it creates a model of learning community for pragmatic and cooperative learning Dialogue facilitates all the characteristics of Learning community thus building of learning community is a result of Dialogue process. Some communities continue with social media and encourage learning in future. Author is in touch with some of the participants who found it very interesting and innovative. Learning communities still working together as help to each other in learning and grow better.

## Suggestions

As findings of the present study revealed that dialogue assist deeper understanding and integration of one another, and more socialization takes place during the process with great compassion for teachers /students as fellow participants in the learning enterprise. It should be practiced in national conferences specially children congresses as method to empower all students as learners and to provide enhanced learning opportunities for the individual members. It must be encouraged within school and college fences to build shared vision, development of personal mastery, to enhance appreciation for diversity, conflict resolution of mental models that empower all students as better learners.

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