

## **Hypothesis for Change: Open Dialogue – in our World.**

‘We can see other people’s behaviour, but not their experience.

This has led some people to insist that psychology has nothing to do with the other person’s experience, but only with his behaviour.

R.D. Laing – *The Politics of Experience*.

### **Introduction:**

Talking about Open Dialogue, and encouraging dialogical connections in Western Australia, will be reflected on in this article as a path toward consolidating greater communal cohesion through the understanding of dialogue in general, and its capacity to harmonise the community. This comes before suggesting a re-construction of the psychiatric system; the foundations haven’t been cemented yet.

The process in Western Lapland, Finland, of using ‘Trial and Error’ and ‘Feelings of Comfort and Discomfort’, to re-construct the psychiatric system, tapped into the wisdom of the past and allowed responses that resonated with the human spirit; creating a humanistic way of listening to ourselves and others, and together creating what was eventually called Open Dialogue. (Seikkula & Arnkil. 2017)

This was influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle of philosophers, writers and educators.

According to Bakhtinian theory, *an individual does not exist outside of dialogue*– a dialogue in which the consciousness of a speaker encounters the consciousness of another speaker; a dialogue that reveals conflicts; a dialogue that embodies history and culture; and therefore, a dialogue that is multifaceted. This view of dialogue considers the social location that constructs the self and the other. [...] In the Bakhtinian sense, dialogue goes beyond oral communication– dialogue is what guarantees our existence. (Moraes, Marcia. 1996)

Wisdom can only be recognised by our unconscious connections and validated by dialogical connections; an open dialogue, in or out of the social group circle, can lead to community connections that help us to more fully accept our psychic responses toward each-other, so that we become more in-tune with the human spirit. We contend that the local psychiatric system is way out-of-tune with human potential.

### **Changing Things:**

In Finland where this process originated, there were already advancements implemented within the education system, and they had achieved a needs-adapted approach within medical systems. These two factors would seem necessary to establish a solid base on which to allow a trial-and-error process governed by emotional responses. Countries like Australia would benefit from working toward the same foundations. In fact, and considering history, this seems very necessary.

Can we in Australia, create a path to help restructure our troubled medical systems in general, particularly in psychiatry. These systems often suggest that there is a need of

achieving improvements, but where is there a desire for change, and what change would look like in those systems – has yet to be revealed.

### **The Big Picture:**

Looking at the “big picture” first, on our Planet; wondering why we haven’t noticed that there is little evidence of improvement in our needs as a gregarious species. We know there is no cessation of aggression on Planet Earth, and our planet itself is in an over-stressed state due to human actions and behaviour. There are few considerations of the needs and tendencies of the human race. This means that next generations are not able to take on the challenges that this generation is struggling with; in part not even aware of? We haven’t fully accepted the role we have played in getting to this point – maybe toward the point of no return.

One way of progressing to change would be to look to the past that has been ignored, and why that has been the case. There is a need to be inspired by the science and innovations that have already shown us that evidence of ways to reverse the decline already exist; but these are being ignored. The power to create positive change needs to be put into different hands. Global extortion needs to be reduced to allow moving forward by supporting equal distribution of resources. And so on and so forth.

The pre-requisites toward saving the planet, and equalising resources already exists within Open Dialogue principles; is already embedded in humane education processes which lead to a greater understanding of the self, the unconscious, the human nervous system, our planet, and its inhabitants, ‘including’ human ones.

### **What we have left behind:**

Waldorf, Montessori, Summerhill, Reggio Emilia, Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, Paulo Freire. There are many successful creative histories of education activities that have allowed children and adults the freedom they need to develop their own voices through their interests and activities; to become connected with one another, to be engaged with their world. These changes can only happen through an open dialogue that eliminates the authoritarian monologue of the majority of education systems in Australia. Being the majority, means that the majority of students are not given the connections to their lives that would naturally allow the freedom of dialogue with those in their lives. Rather they are alienated from themselves, and their environments. R.D.Laing suggests that:

“The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one’s mind, is the condition of the normal man. Society highly values its normal man. It educates children to lose themselves and to be absurd, and thus be normal. [...] If our experience is destroyed, our behaviour will be destructive. If our experience is destroyed, we have lost our own selves.” (Laing. R.D. 1975)

We are sceptical of our so-called leaders, we hope for the best deal, being prepared to be disappointed. How does this disjunct in the community continue in this way.

It is just one element of a capitalistic system that has got out of hand – meaning there is no equity. And with no equity there is no respect for the other. Doesn't that mean we need dialogical education for everyone so we can build on the other's ideas and they can build on ours. Paulo Freire has said that:

“Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.” (Freire, Paulo.1996)

### **Current Considerations:**

One area of hope, the younger members of our community, seem to see the problems more clearly and are demanding change. They can't understand why there is no adequate action in improving these situations: global warming, environmental degradation and destruction; disharmony and conflict between different social groups.

They can't vote to express their stress. And it is this age group whose health is being challenged through professional reliance on pharmaceuticals and hospitalisation – perpetrating a worsening situation that reduces their very ability to comprehend the options; and the options are finding it difficult to have their voices heard.

And so, like most adults, adolescents will soon be completely domesticated, to become malleable in the hands of those who are in control of managing our world's resources to their own advantage. There seems no point in going forward anymore, as to quote Martin Heidegger, “The dreadful has already happened”. Going forward when there is abundant evidence that we are failing our planet and all the life on it, is psychologically suicidal. But do we really think this is true; we have been assured that everything will be done to remedy situations we are sceptical about.

### **Dialogue is the solution:**

What has this got to do with dialogue and dialogical treatment in Western Australia? Are we getting off the track? Let's see about that.

There would seem to be something reductionist in the variations that are chosen to substitute for the Finnish Open Dialogue. Probably there are additions, reductions, that might attract more acceptance of the Open Dialogue concept within different systems in different cultures and seemingly achieving some improvements to the 'treatment as usual' programs. But unless the core of the Finnish revelations are understood, Open Dialogue could be misunderstood; dialogue itself would be misunderstood.

Robert Whitaker, author of “The Anatomy of an Epidemic,” in a speech in Copenhagen in 2018, said that some psychiatrists in the USA are not using the “true form” of Open Dialogue, especially concerning the reduction and consensual use of pharmaceuticals. “I think that is going to be the downfall of Open Dialogue there.” (Whitaker, R. 2019)

This should be a cautionary signal for Australians who see Open Dialogue from the Finnish perspective, since there is a propensity at governance levels to be uncritical of most things from the USA. We are promoting the Finnish model simply because, as well

as a psychosocial treatment, Finland promotes dialogue in early childhood and adolescent education. Other European countries support early dialogical education, so dialogical discussion becomes more of a common event in communities. This has been the effect in Finland, so much so that there is now very little evidence there of first-episode psychosis in Western Lapland, the origin of Open Dialogue. The community has been strengthened by the discovery of how powerful an all-inclusive dialogue can be to learning about oneself and others, and therefore their World.

The probability of compromise to achieve progress seems inevitable, considering the power of economics as more important than progressing a community's ability to think critically about self-education and preservation. Still we should be wary of variations that don't achieve the desired outcomes because of assumptions made of the efficiency of the variation. This is where an estimation of the success needs to have a way of assessing the outcomes towards progressing equality. The corner stone in tune with human needs, is a dialogical education – so that the whole community will experience the connectivity to others and oneself. We all have the need for dialogue, because it is an instrument of collective thought.

The considerations of the needs and tendencies of us all should be a priority of any community we are involved in. The promotion of Open Dialogue as a professional, social and therapeutic connection, is a natural contribution to communal needs that could engender change to the capitalistic structure of the Australian culture. History, through the work of Paulo Freire, suggests:

“Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men's incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with others.” (Freire, 1996)

### **Old Ideas can Become New Ideas:**

There is a resistance within the psychiatry profession; with the Chief Psychiatrist of WA admitting that he had no power to make changes; and government officials being too busy. This is not unusual; systems holding on to what is 'business as usual'. Recent changes to the government and parliamentary structure in Australia, however, make the possibility of change more feasible; giving hope once more that change is possible.

As Paulo Freire had experienced, this means moving out in constant search for the connections that are interested in being supportive in promoting the importance of personal, social, commercial dialogue, and the psychosocial aspects of Finnish Open Dialogue.

The search will continue in Perth, Western Australia, through contacts by and with mental health agencies, systemic family therapy links, interested politicians and involved citizens.

**Following the 'Freire Praxis': your word = your work = your action – directed so as to create improvement in your World.**

### **References:**

Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London. Penguin Books.

Laing, R.D. (1975) *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*. England. Penguin Books.

Moraes, M. (1996). *Bilingual Education: A Dialogue with the Bakhtin Circle*. New York. State University of New York Press.

Seikkula, J. & Arnkil, T.E. (2017) *Open Dialogues and Anticipations – Respecting Otherness in the Present Moment*. Helsinki. Juvenes Print – Finnish University Print Ltd.

Whitaker, R. “*Whitaker – Treatments Alternative to Psychiatry-March 8 2019 – Dispuk-CPH*”. Video Access: <https://youtu.be/5DliuhZJR9A> -- Uploaded 15/04/2019. Available on 2/08/2022.

*Author: Neil W Sullivan 2022*