

The background of the entire cover is a sunburst pattern. It consists of numerous thin, light-colored lines radiating from a central point, creating a starburst effect. The lines are set against a background of alternating yellow and orange rays that also radiate from the center, creating a vibrant, warm glow.

On Teaching and Learning

Putting the Principles and Practices
of Dialogue Education into Action

Jane Vella

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of Dialogue Education into Action**

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Foreword by Joanna Ashworth

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*To Global Learning Partners
around the world*

Foreword

I first met Jane Vella at a Global Learning Partners conference outside of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, at one of the best learning occasions I have ever attended. It was intellectually stimulating, it was fun, the people were friendly, and the showcases and workshops expertly demonstrated creative ways to bring dialogue education into diverse teaching and learning activities. I was invited to sing a song with people I had just met, share my personal definitions of *dialogue*, create a collage, and discuss my values and assumptions about teaching, among other things. In doing all this, I connected emotionally and intellectually with other participants and with the content.

In the midst of this lively international network of skilled dialogue education practitioners there was Jane. Recovering from painful knee surgery, she still held forth with a broad smile, making personal connections with everyone at the conference. I mean everyone. We knew we all mattered to Jane.

Jane Vella lives her life consonant with the values of dialogue education: engagement, reciprocity, friendship, and respect. She walks her talk. Here's one example from her book *Taking Learning to Task* (2001). While preparing to teach a graduate program at a school of public health, Jane wanted to get to know her students personally. So she called each of them up to introduce herself and ask them to dinner. Who does this? Most students were so surprised, so speechless, what else could they do but accept? She wanted to know them and to learn what experiences shaped their lives and to discover what hopes and expectations they had for the program.

Here's another true story. An admirer of Jane's work called her one afternoon, full of excitement, to tell her he had just finished reading *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*, and to share how it had revolutionized his approach to information technology training. She invited him to dinner. They sat on Jane's back porch talking into the night.

Dialogue education springs from a place of goodness, integrity, and commitment to equity—values that are also central to democracy. Learners are not treated as objects into whom teachers deposit received wisdom. They are treated as beings worthy of respect, recognized for the knowledge and experience they bring into the learning experience. They are players in the game, not bystanders in an audience. Dialogue education also takes seriously the importance of safety and belonging. It suggests an approach to creating learning spaces where both one's certainties and one's questions are welcomed.

In my role as director of Dialogue Programs at Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue in Vancouver, I live and breathe dialogue. My work at the university involves teaching the theory and practice of dialogue, convening public dialogue, and offering programs that assist public officials, policy makers, community development specialists, meeting facilitators, and educators in learning how to "do" dialogue. Recently, we offered a course on dialogue education to our community of learners in and outside of the university to rave reviews. In small ways and large, the approach reminded me to walk the talk and to consistently involve students—and not to rob them of learning opportunities by teaching at them instead of inviting them to participate.

A question that comes up often from faculty is, How can I bring dialogue into my lectures? How indeed! I was present at a university conference on teaching where Jane Vella delivered the keynote address as an interactive and meaningful experience. We learned about dialogue education by using it and reflecting on our use, by being transformed from a passive audience to an active community of learners.

Dialogue education is about creating a learning space in which learners feel a sense of belonging and inclusion. It is a profound thing to be treated as someone who belongs—with a voice and a right to take part in your own learning—regardless of content or curriculum. It takes a strong belief that the learners you teach have a right to design toward such a relationship.

Taking her inspiration from leaders in adult education such as Paulo Friere and Malcolm Knowles, Jane Vella is a significant contributor in her own right. This book will open you up to a way of knowing and doing that, when taken to heart and moved into practice, will have you understand anew what it can mean to teach and to learn in dialogue.

*Joanna Ashworth
Vancouver, British Columbia*

Preface

Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.

Wayfarer, there is no way, we make the way by walking.

—Antonio Machado

Millennium goals, millennium hopes, millennium celebrations marked the opening of the twenty-first century. However, as the first decade of the century moves to a war-weary close, we find systems of learning and teaching still weighted down by the domination deplored by Paulo Freire in the middle of the twentieth century. I feel a new urgency to address both the need for dialogue in teaching and learning and the potential of dialogue education as it has emerged since Freire's classic work stirred the waters. We can be inspired and led by his passion for "a world in which it will be easier to love" (Freire, 1972, p. 6) as we work to replace domination with dialogue in every teaching and learning event.

Freire spoke of the danger of those who "suffered from an absence of doubt" (Freire, 1972, p. 11). Domination systems cannot allow doubt. Those who differ are identified as "the evil empire," and forces are consolidated to systemically eradicate them. Our attitude as teachers toward learners affects not only their learning but also their being in this world. One basic assumption of this work is the mutuality of education and wider systems: economic, political, civil, legal, religious. We teach the way we have been taught until we stop long enough to examine how we are teaching and decide to do otherwise. Since we live in a connected universe, each teacher's reflection and awakening affects us all.

I read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in the nineteen-seventies and recognized then and there the potential of dialogue. The system known as dialogue education has been developing for twenty-five years. I am grateful to Jossey-Bass for this opportunity to present anew the basics of this emerging system, one of whose operative axioms is *pray for doubt*. Although such a system is necessary for continuity and quality control, any system can be dangerous and prone to domination. Walter Wink (1992) speaks of a domination system and *powers* that can take over the best of intentions and ventures. We must be wary of being so sure that dialogue is impossible.

Dialogue education needs that particular axiom: *pray for doubt*. I must doubt this system if I am to serve learners honestly with it. I am called to *fold* the opposites of wary doubt and unswerving dedication into a strong and flexible system that has *learning* as its goal. This is simply good scientific theory. As soon as a new theory and practice (such as dialogue education) has been articulated and "proven," earnest social scientists are moved to disprove, and thus to improve it.

I invite readers to come to this text with that wary doubt, demanding sound theory and empirically proven practice that they can, in turn, disprove and thus improve. No system stands still. With every new teacher and every new context, dialogue education changes, becoming what it can and must be to work in the struggle toward accountable, autonomous learning. Such an aware, scientific stance is deeply demanding. Nothing less is acceptable.

The basic assumption of this system is that teaching is for *learning*. As we distinguish the two here, we will show some high standards for both that can be met as teachers design for learning, not merely for good teaching. Plato pointed out that the end of the Socratic dialogues was indeed *perplexity*. Reaching that end as subtly and serenely as Socrates did involved exquisite teaching. The learning was less exquisite as the perplexed student left in awe at his teacher and somewhat less sure of himself.

When I was preparing *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* in 1993, my editor at Jossey-Bass, the inestimable Gale Erlandson, returned my fourth full draft with a note: “Here are some suggestions for revisions to your wonderful book.” Her suggestions went to thirty-five pages, single-spaced. I told my sister, Joan, who was working with me to prepare the manuscript: “I do not need this!” Joan wisely responded, “Perhaps there are some people who do.”

Gale is an affirming teacher, a tireless learner. She was using the dialogue education approach we were describing in that early book in her management of this feisty old author. And Joan was teaching me through her perceptive challenge, saying essentially, “You cannot give up now.”

Notice the human power relations at work here: Gale and I, Joan and I, Gale and Joan laughingly glancing at one another across the country, knowing they had me at “your wonderful book” and “perhaps there are some people who do!” Motivation is being caught in just such an environment of respect, affirmation, and challenge. I learned from Gale and Joan a number of things: I could be motivated, I could rise to the challenge, I had allies in this project (Gale and Joan were two of them), and I had more work to do. These two great women taught me that day much about teaching—and learning.

Recently, David Brightman, Gale’s successor at Jossey-Bass, invited me to prepare a book *telling others how to do what you know how to do*. I have taken that as an invitation to offer anew the growing treasures of dialogue education as I know them. The need to enhance teaching skills and learning theory in this twenty-first century is heightened by the global imperative for peaceful systems informed by inclusive dialogue at every level. Dialogue education, as a science and an art, is one way to meet that need. I welcome all readers as fellow *wayfarers, making the way by walking*.

The title of this book *On Teaching and Learning* is a bold challenge to readers to reach into the heart of the education issue and to examine our intention and purpose.

On Teaching

The end of teaching is learning.

Teaching has been the joy of my life. I have been doing it as a professional for over fifty-four years. When I started, in 1953, I was filled with theories and self-confidence. In an unruly third grade classroom near Columbia University in New York City, those theories and that self-confidence began to diminish. As the noise level rose, I admonished the energetic boys and girls: “Wouldn’t it be better if you spoke quietly to one another? Can’t you get your work done better if you do so quietly?” Finally, eight-year-old Louie stood up in his seat and explained to his classmates: “She means *shut up!*”

That was my *first* day of practice teaching.

My professors in Teachers’ College had shown me how to organize a lesson, how to structure a lesson plan and build a curriculum. They hadn’t told me about Louie, and all the diverse Louies who have followed me through the years, translating, cajoling, urging, directing me to move from fear into the true confidence of dialogue.

Paulo Freire, Revolutionary Teacher

Dialogue education, as described in this book, was inspired by the work of a kindly, fatherly Brazilian teacher whose roots in poverty in Recife, Brazil, led him to design teaching that could lead to a “world in which it is easier to love” (Freire, 1972, p. 6). I sat at the feet of Paulo Freire in Tanzania, in France, and in the United States. His vision has inspired hundreds of thousands of teachers around the world to use a dialogic approach to teaching in order to confront the ubiquitous threat of the domination system in education, in public policy, in health care, and, indeed, in all aspects of culture and society. With Freire, I hold that as we teach, so do we live.

The day Freire died, May 2, 1997, I was starting to teach an advanced learning course in dialogue education in North Carolina

with twelve men and women who had been using this approach for a few years. They had brought to the course the textbook of their own dialogue education designs for scrutiny and development.

We gently celebrated the life and work of this good man before we began our first day of work together. One woman from Nicaragua told of a sacred custom there: when someone thought of a fallen comrade, they said respectfully: “*Fernando vive* (Fernando lives).” Throughout that course, at moments of learning or questioning or conflict, someone or another would say quietly: “*Paulo vive.*”

Freire received the UNESCO Prize for Education for Peace in 1986. Dialogue education, a critical pedagogy, is not an end in itself; it is toward making society what it can be: a place of peace. This means that the classroom is a place of peace; a place of dialogue, not domination. Teaching with dialogue education involves listening to learners at every level, respecting them as subjects or decision makers of their own learning, and evoking their innate power. We design and do dialogue education to prove that such a society is possible and to bring it into being.

Teaching, as Freire wrote of it, was evocative, inviting adult learners to consider their own lives and experience and the potential they dreamed of. He was relentless in demanding quality reading, quality questioning, quality research and study. In Africa he told me: “You must search out all the proverbs, all the tales and myths.”

He told a large group of University of Dar es Salaam students that he was proud of one thing he did in his life: “I married my Elza.” He knew the generative theme of these young men and women and made a direct connection to them through the fog of language, geography, and culture. The wisdom of honoring generative themes—those ideas that generate energy among a group of learners—is part of Freire’s heritage.

One evening, after dinner at our tiny Dar es Salaam cottage, he told us wistfully, “My friends are killing me, with praise.” Freire planted in me the seed of the axiom *Pray for doubt*. Freire Institutes at the University of California, in South Africa, and in Brazil carry on this work, as I trust this book does. *Paulo vive.*

Instructional Technology

What I learned in Teachers' College in the fifties was a paper form of instructional technology: how to design classes and lesson plans and deliver courses with efficiency and skill. I learned that well, and I am still studying both the paper and electronic forms. Gagne, Mager, Bloom, and Lewin are teachers whose work is now classic; dialogue education assumes teachers have read these classics and absorbed the basics of design, feedback, and evaluation.

Dialogue education gives a unique, idiosyncratic shape to teaching, without neglecting any of the basic skills. In *Experience and Education* John Dewey reminds us: "The way out of scholastic systems that made the past an *end* in itself is to make acquaintance with the past as a *means* of understanding the present" (1963, p. 78).

Teaching skills involve first of all a philosophy of education, a clear personal sense of why this process is designed the way it is. The instructional technology offered in courses on dialogue education are toward respect and realization of the adult learners' unique culture and experience. Whether in a hospital setting, an industrial training room, or a college classroom, the adult learner comes with a full bag of knowledge and life. Teaching via dialogue means getting in touch with everything in that bag that can make new content meaningful, immediate, and memorable.

Teaching adults for transformation involves first meeting those adults, learning from them about their present contexts, and shaping content so it is comprehensible and nourishing. It is not to distort the past, or the research, or the textbook. It is to prepare that content in such a way as to connect it to these lives.

In the twenty-first century, content is as accessible to learners as the Enter key on their computer keyboard. Teaching that content is more than presenting it in a Microsoft PowerPoint or projected format; it is organizing sets of content in a reasonable and well-sequenced manner, shaping it into learning tasks that are accessible and challenging to adult learners so that their experience of

learning is meaningful to them. The examples offered in chapters Eleven through Fifteen show that teaching using the principles and practices of dialogue education involves intense and extensive research and selection and preparation of content.

The instructional technology of dialogue education includes the use of all the classic guidebooks, in such an accessible way as to invite sound, honest, integrating dialogue with and among adult learners. The dialogue is not a dialogue between teacher and learner, but among learners, of whom the teacher is one.

Where Is the Teacher?

Freire wrote “Only the student can name the moment of the death of the professor.” I suggest that the professor herself can in fact name that moment when she realizes that she too is a student, learning from the adults in the highly structured dialogue she has designed. When adults are deeply engaged in a learning task, huddled around significant learning materials (a map, a graph, a printout from a website, or a computer screen), in profound dialogue toward the completion of the task, it may be hard to find the teacher, but it is not at all difficult to see the teaching that is occurring.

At our Episcopal church, the priest designed a dialogue education program on the Millenium Development Goals. She invited the adult participants to select a single one of the eight goals that spoke most directly to them. Teams of two or three men and women prepared, with help from the priest, content from the Internet and learning tasks for a one-hour session over ten Sunday mornings. The sessions were lively and full of good learning. However, there was no doubt that those who learned the most from any session were those who prepared it. This is a simple example of an attitude toward teaching that honors the adult learner as subject or decision maker of her own learning.

We teach the way we were taught. Freire’s experience in a dominated, domesticated society moved him to reflect on the power

of education and to decide that he did *not* want to teach the way he was taught. This is a critical step in the evolution of a dialogue educator: the recognition of all of the implications of a dominating, “banking” (Freire, 1972, p. 71) system of teaching.

Once a decision is made to transform teaching into dialogue education, the same axiom holds: “We teach the way we were taught.” There can be no valid courses about dialogue education that do not use it. Incongruity invalidates. Learning to use dialogue education in one’s particular situation involves the experience of a new way of teaching. Whether this experience can be virtual is at present a very real question and a serious research agenda.

What does a dialogue educator do when she teaches? In a formal setting, such as you will see in the example chapters Eleven through Fifteen, the teacher’s first task is to design. She organizes her content and process with the help of the seven design steps, listens to the learners about their context and their expectations of her teaching, prepares learning materials, and prepares herself to teach the complex content, whatever it is.

She sets up the learning environment with a sequence of steps, building safety and setting the learning challenge. She refers constantly to the learning needs and resources assessment so as to make the essential connection between learners’ contexts and the new, complex content. She sets learning tasks clearly and leads the sharing that follows the learning, making endless connections to other aspects of the content being taught, illustrating learners’ points with her stories and her factual knowledge, moving them on through the elegant sequence of learning tasks toward the promised proficiency and knowledge.

On Learning

Learning is for transformation toward peace.

The purpose or end of dialogue education is learning; the end of learning is personal and social transformation toward peace. Such an assumption demands uncompromising congruence between the

means and the end. If our education is violent, it cannot have the named end. The first learners in a dialogue education program are the designers and teachers. If the end is violent, dialogue education is not an appropriate process.

All that we do in dialogue education—all the principles and practices, all the strategies and technical aspects, all the design and materials, all the decisions—are toward learning. I liken this process to what occurs in a young family when the first child is born: from that moment on everything revolves around the child. Everything.

Although the patterns described in this book are tight and structured, they must give way if they block or impede learning. There is no purity here: only a single-minded purpose. Teaching can get in the way of learning. The design of dialogue education, formal or informal, protects learners in their learning from teachers and teaching that could steal the learning opportunity from learners by telling, or “helping.” A brilliant teacher may find this discipline demanding, as it challenges him to focus that brilliance on the learning process of this particular group.

Teachers can get distracted by the discovery of a superb set of exercises that teach exactly what they want taught, or by a reading that captures exactly the thought they want shared, or by an expert whose competence will add so much to the debate or the presentation. In dialogue education, we welcome these resources insofar as they serve learning and are somewhat a part of a design. Again, congruence serves. The operative question: How does this intervention serve their learning? I am reminded of the oath that physicians swear to uphold: *First, do no harm.*

Teachers can get swept off their feet by the sound of their own voice sharing their knowledge or skills. The applause of generations of students and peers is not easily turned off. That was a reward for good teaching. We are now focusing on good learning and celebrate the difference. Materials can get in the way of learning. You may have noticed that a learning task is for the learner. Throughout this book, in all the examples offered, there is no word

about what the teacher should do. In most textbooks and teaching guides, these words are common: *tell the students . . . show the students . . . explain to them . . .*

Dialogue education materials will focus on the learners in the act of learning. There is time for telling and showing and explaining on the part of the teacher in the *input* section, in which the directives are to the learners: *listen, write, respond, consider, watch this film and suggest a new title . . .* Learners get good lectures in dialogue education designs. They also get clear directions on what they might do to make the content of that lecture their own.

Materials can be challenging and compelling, complex and comprehensive. They simply must serve learning.

Epistemological Concerns

Freire's constant, delightful question was, *What is to know?* We distinguish *Who*: the knowers or subjects; *What*: the knowable or objects; and *How*: the means of knowing.

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge. It attempts to answer the basic question: What distinguishes true (adequate) knowledge from false (inadequate) knowledge? Practically, this question translates into issues of scientific methodology: How can one develop theories or models that are better than competing theories? It also forms one of the pillars of the new sciences of cognition, which developed from the information processing approach to psychology and from artificial intelligence, as an attempt to develop computer programs that mimic a human's capacity to use knowledge in an intelligent way (see <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/EPISTEMI.html>).

The focus of dialogue education is epistemology: *What is to know?* This is politically motivated, because as dialogue educators we are bound to be inclusive. Such inclusion involves listening to wildly diverse perspectives and considering incomprehensible purposes. Our epistemology not only guides us, but also compels us to include all who come to learn. Knowing the learners' contexts can