

# Dialogue

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# Argumentation

- “I don’t know what I think about anything until I’ve argued about it”

## What happens in a friendly argument?

- Formulation
- Challenge
- Reformulation and attack again
- Arguments both sides refined
- You end up with a new position
- Learning achieved

## Contestation

- The familiar word for argument in academic circles
- Two or more **consenting** adults **talking, listening and adapting**
- People with **expertise**
- That's a form of dialogue, certainly

## Contestation

- Contestation reveals flaws
- Enables better ways of doing things
- Our own prejudices and assumptions are otherwise very limiting

## New formulation

- From:  
“I don’t know what I think about anything until I’ve argued about it”
- To:  
“I can’t be confident that any course of action is truly optimal unless it’s been contested”

## Why contestation in the context of this meeting?

- Because research into adult learning can be very like contestation
- .... and have the same benefits

## Metaphorically ...

- We might seek dialogue/contestation between:

The practice of lifelong learning  
and

The meta-activity of research into the processes  
of that same learning

Let's try to apply this idea ...

... with a **hypothesis**

- *External challenge informed by research improves the effectiveness of the educational process*
- What evidence might there be for this?
- What might be the conditions for the most effective dialogue?

## Parameters for good dialogue?

- What level of expertise for researchers and for learners?
- What degree/nature of consent required?
- ... for dialogue to be creative not destructive
  
- Which **kinds** of research might have real beneficial impacts?

## Parameters for good dialogue?

- Would hypothesis apply to all kinds of CE process
- ... or just to some kinds?
  
- Does it depend upon the
  - level
  - commitment
  - nature
  - ?.... of the learners?

## Parameters for good dialogue?

- Does it depend upon the
  - level
  - commitment
  - nature
  - sophistication
  - ability to remain in the background.... of the researchers / research facilitators?

## Parameters for good dialogue

- Maybe the project has answered all these interesting questions?
- It will be interesting to see, later!

## My own experience

- Most characteristically ***work-based participative research***
- Learners and teachers collaborate to critique their learning
- External facilitators
- (External facilitators may be contracted to enhance the learning, or may actually be researchers, who have the same effect)

## Characteristics of work-based participative research

- Excitement
- ... at seeing the virtuous circle
- Learners are the subjects and the objects of research
  - Critique of the learners' effectiveness in learning and
  - Of the teaching/learning process itself



## Characteristics of work-based participative research

- Courage needed initially
- but criticism not personalised
- Dialogue between learning and learning-research can be extremely intimate
- ... like young lovers sharing experiences ...
- (as with young lovers, process can get quite excited, as participants lose fear and start to explore each other!)

## What of other kinds of research and of CE?

- Little chance of the heady momentum of the virtuous circle
- But the providers of CE products can learn
- So **perhaps** here one can still talk of a dialogue?
- But a bit more like two old people on a park bench, with lots of silences??

## What of other kinds of research and of CE?

- I'm not convinced that the idea of "dialogue" so easily applies to all kinds of CE
- Or for that matter to all kinds of research
- There is so very much variety

## My preference

- Put the teacher in the background
- Concentrate on the learner-professional
- How to facilitate their learning?
- Continuous monitoring and feedback invited by the form of this question

## My preference

- As soon as monitor-researchers are identified as the same as the learners
  - ‘dialogue’ becomes possible
  - the process kicks off
- Learners become expert without being explicitly taught by experts!
- And expertise moves within the reach of everyone.

## The key features

- Empower and trust people
- Create an environment where
  - they have autonomy
  - learning can become discovery and exciting
  - contestation and critique of the learning process is part of the process
- learning becomes self-motivating and self-directed
- What can be better than that?