

Diversity Circles: A Comparison of Dialogue & Debate

Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.
Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.

In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.
In debate, winning is the goal.

In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.
In debate, one listens to the other side(s) in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.

Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.
Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.

Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.
Debate defends assumptions as truth.

Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.
Debate causes critique of the other position.

Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.
Debate defends one's own position as the best solution and excludes other solutions.

Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.
Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.

In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.
In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.

Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.
Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.

In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.
In debate, one searches for glaring differences.

In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other position(s).
In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position(s).

Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks not to alienate or offend.
Debate involves a countering of the other position(s) without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.

Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.
Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.

Dialogue remains open-ended.
Debate implies a conclusion.