

## **A COMPARISON OF DIALOGUE & DEBATE**

*From Study Circles Resource Center; adapted from a paper by Shelley Berman,  
based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of  
Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR)*

***Dialogue is collaborative. Two or more sides work together toward common understanding.***

Debate is oppositional. Two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove the 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 in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.

***Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.***

Debate affirms a person's own point of view.

***Dialogue reveals assumptions for re-evaluation.***

Debate defends assumptions as truth.

***Dialogue causes introspection of one's own position.***

Debate causes critique of the other position.

***Dialogue is flexible in nature.***

Debate is rigid in nature.

***Dialogue stresses the skill of synthesis.***

Debate stresses the skill of analysis.

***Dialogue opens the possibility of finding a better solution than any original ones.***

Debate defends one's own position as the best solution and excludes other ones.

***Dialogue strives for multiplicity in perspective.***

Debate strives for singularity in perspective.

***Dialogue affirms the relationship between the participants through collaboration.***

Debate affirms one's own strength in opposition to the other points of view.

***Dialogue remains open-ended.***

Debate implies a conclusion.

***Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude, 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 challenges 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.***

In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.

***Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks not to alienate or offend.***

Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationships.

***Dialogue assumes that many people have the answer, and that together they can put them into a workable answer.***

Debate assumes that there is one answer and that someone has it.

***In dialogue, everyone is part of the solution to the problem.***

In debate, one person or viewpoint wins over the other.

***Dialogue affirms the idea of people learning from each other.***

Debate affirms the idea of people learning individually in competition with others.