

Response by Ádám Bethlenfalvy

Dear Milena,

I found reading your chapter really exciting! As a resident of a highly polarized East European country, your focus on dialogue as a crucial component of democracy made real sense. In my immediate environment, it is quite clear that institutional politics does everything possible to quash dialogue. The aim seems to be for people to stay behind their barricades and be suspicious or judgmental about people who are on a different 'side'. There is also much literature about how social media bubbles (created by the algorithms) radicalize and mislead people—these spaces create a false sense of dialogue, when actually they are echo chambers, reinforcing notions that are not contested, fact-checked, or related to any other perspective or human experience. I really appreciate the example of Daria and her grandmother where the task was to talk about a piece of art with someone who is possibly in a different position. The safety of talking about a piece of art seems important! Reading your text raised questions in me concerning what makes people open or even capable of dialogue. How can you 'practice' listening to ideas or experiences that deviate from yours?

The notion of the concept "contact zone" seems a really useful one. I can relate it to some of my experiences working with diverse groups where exploring stories or trying to create an open space for dialogue between students from very different backgrounds. Again, the aim of creating something together and the importance of understanding each other to be able to do it is mediated through the task itself.

I was wondering about whether you have any thoughts on what the content of dialogue should be preferably, or is the act of engagement the aim itself?

You claim that dialogue can lead to change in the individual. Connecting this with the notion of the concept “contact zone” shifts the perspective of dialogue to a social encounter, a change in social understanding. I agree that these encounters would definitely make the world a more livable place. It also opens the question if dialogue leads to action and if action is needed for social change.

Thank you for sharing these thoughts—it raised useful questions concerning my own practice, and I am sure others will find it useful as well for our field!

*Best wishes,
Adam*