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## **Leaping Into the Misty Future**

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Wednesday, March 18, 2015 -- Michelle Strutzenberger

An intriguing number of those who joined the Peterborough Dialogues “taste-test” yesterday admitted they weren’t sure why they had come. Some went so far as to say they had absolutely no idea what the dialogues are about — even after having reviewed the media that’s been created. Still, they came.

In many cases, it was the invitation of a friend or trusted colleague that had inspired people to drop by for the March 17 lunch and brief experiential introduction to the dialogues.

One participant shared a great story of receiving a knock on his door last Sunday night from a neighbour who went on to make enough of a case for him to come to the luncheon that he did.

What’s sparking such interest in the Peterborough Dialogues? Why are they being mentioned in lectures at the local university and inspiring tweets of encouragement from across the ocean? Why would a man interrupt his neighbour’s peaceful Sunday evening to encourage him to attend? What brings a globally respected author, Peter Block, to offer to support the development of the dialogues in whatever way he can?

There are no doubt about as many answers to those questions as there are people who’ve been curious about the dialogues.

But one theme that also surfaced in yesterday’s gathering is that people want to find new ways to be active members of their community, this place they call home – without the adversarial relations and toxicity that has characterized the past

community engagement experiences of many.

People want to have a different kind of community conversation and experience — not necessarily different content, but certainly a different approach, not polarizing but making room for disagreements in a respectful way, honouring of the other's humanity.

Are the Peterborough Dialogues an answer to that longing?

They certainly have the potential, I think, especially given the calling question — How can we create a local, living oasis in a global storm of shifting sands? — as well as given the kinds of methodologies that will frame how they are carried out, from Appreciative Inquiry to asset-based community development.

One telling tidbit for me yesterday was the response to one of the questions put forward for the group to answer in rounds of three. People described feeling the question in a physical way, in their bellies and their chests. There was a strong reaction of anxiety and excitement all rolled into one.

So did folks leave yesterday's gathering with the fog cleared on their understanding of this effort? It seemed so, at least for some, somewhat.

But even I, working as I have on the edges of this thing, still find it somewhat of a mystery — particularly in terms of understanding what it might yield. I want to know it will generate this and this, in my personal life, my community, my workplace. Yet there's also a strong sense that the best stuff will happen as I'm both open to the ambiguity of it all and take a stand on creating my own preferred outcomes. The organizers have committed to holding this space, offering the gift of their generative hosting and narration. It's a beautiful space where most anything might happen. And I as a participant must just leap — step up and step out into the misty future. I both like and rather hate that feeling, the one that comes before leaping, I mean — but here goes. Eyes squeezed shut. Because I do truly want to be part of adding to this community's thriving — and this looks about as promising a way to do that as any. I'm just glad I won't be alone.

*For more information, join the mailing list at [peterboroughdialogues.ca](http://peterboroughdialogues.ca). You can follow this project on Twitter at [@ptbdialogues](https://twitter.com/ptbdialogues).*

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