

What Will Become of Peterborough Dialogues?



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Awakening to healing and becoming whole In community

Monday, February 13, 2017 -- Peter Pula

In 2015, the year Axiom News gave birth to the Peterborough Dialogues, over 100 gatherings were hosted. I was asked by an astounded colleague in Europe, why would anyone do that? Well, to know and to serve. That's why.

We started by inviting people to lunch for a 90 minute connecting and discovery dialogue. What we found was that the power of those short conversations was deeply moving and unfamiliar. So we opened up and hosted two dialogue cohorts who gathered for 20 hours each over a period of 10 weeks.

Those gatherings sparked a year of deep discovery, massive learning, and a surprising amount of wisdom, personal change, and community influence. It was a year of extremely dynamic Action Research.

We learned about, tried, tested, refined, and designed a variety of community dialogue and design forms. We evolved and integrated a world class suite of processes that without a doubt, work. As social practices, as social technologies for cultivating the conditions for transformative change, they work.

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What we weren't successful in designing was a revenue model. We tried a bunch of things. Truth is, it wasn't the business that really interested any of us. It was social evolution; community building, that was at the heart of it. And in the end the Dialogues were a social wonder, an innovation marvel, and a bust as a business. Most of us had to go our separate ways to serve our own livelihoods.

The Year of Action Research was made possible by over \$250,000 in gifts from Axiom News, its staff, and founding partners. That sizeable gift, or investment, was not something we, or I, could personally continue to finance. Our hopes to find a revenue model in time weren't realized. In retrospect, this is natural. We were learning and innovating and this is a hard thing to ask people to support financially.

But, we didn't quit. In the second year, 2016, a great deal of time was taken to let the dust settle, to contemplate and refine what was learned and even take some of the learning to other communities. We kept tilling the soil by hosting [Peterborough Pollinator Summits](#), an [Art Hive Summit](#), a Core Conversation with a [summer cohort](#). We hosted an [Indie-local Economy Summit](#) in the fall. Our Hosting Circle has continued to meet every Tuesday morning and is now diving into the practice of yet another deep dialogue form — a Circle of Trust — based on the work of Parker Palmer and the Centre for Courage and Renewal. It is a step further in.

A very satisfying number of beautiful community initiatives were born at Peterborough Dialogues and continue in the same spirit and ways.

I have travelled the world and watched many communities and dialogue hosts at work. What has been learned and accomplished through the Peterborough Dialogues stands among the best I have seen.

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One of the things we understood when we started was that community organizes differently than organizations. What works in organizations is often ill-suited to community work. The ways we are together, and create together, in community are very different. And, those ways, now known to us, are not well known in the world at large. The nuances are powerful and they make a big difference.

We know that to cultivate community, and indeed heal it, we must host deep and sacred dialogue, in place, with continuity, over time. We know that change happens at the speed of relationship. We know that there are a variety of different kinds of dialogue and design forms for different stages and according to what is arising in community. We know that change comes from strangers.

We knew we had to find a way to host Working Circles that were permeable, welcoming and encouraging of transient participation, and still somehow stable and continuous and able to cultivate what I now call Collected Interdependent Action. This is a fundamentally more challenging, life-giving, and powerful way to organize and inspire. It is different than consensus or majority decision making in important

ways. It demands courage and diversity. It confronts us with life, convergence, divergence, and the death of things, things we often hold, or thought we held, dear.

Community is the answer to most of what ails our society; of this I have no doubt. We have learned, in Peterborough, the practices and principles that can lead the way to being together, in community, in new and powerful ways, ways necessary to overcome the challenges of dissociative globalisation and public systems built to do something critical and forever necessary, but entirely different.

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Community is the way for us to stop the merry-go-round of destructive consumption and to fundamentally shift into the next step of social evolution. We are on the cusp of nothing short, frankly, than the evolution of our species. And, we are not alone.

A second and critical thing we must do, alongside gathering, being, and creating together differently, is to give life to New Narrative.... To share the stories of what is already happening that is leading us to a regenerative way of life and society.

With that in mind, those 'close in' to the Peterborough Dialogues have continued to till the soil locally. We continue to hold the field. And, we are in the process of designing and seeking funding for some powerful, community shifting summits and circles.

There have been rumours that we are out of business. I doubt we were ever in it.

If you are interested in learning more about what dialogues are taking shape please keep an eye on incoming e-mails from us and our social media accounts. If you are interested in financially supporting our work please contact me directly at [peter\(at\)axiomnews.com](mailto:peter(at)axiomnews.com) or 705-741-4421 ext. 28. We are planning specific dialogues that could use financial support, we are available for fee-for-service work

(in the right conditions) in the hosting and media arts, and are welcoming of ongoing monthly support from citizens and associations alike.

This story was originally posted on peterboroughdialogues.media, the news site of the Peterborough Dialogues, a local engagement project designed and hosted by Axiom News.

Comments

Submitted by Nora Smith (not verified) on Tue, 02/21/2017 - 14:46

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The way you forge ahead and share insights makes a way for others. This is a beautiful example of being in service. Thank you Peter and crew!!

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