Chapter 5
Finding a Way In:
Observations From the Field on the Practice of Calling-In Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

Dialogue is central to the process of deep understanding and to building true communities that not only respect cultural and spiritual/faith differences but also excel and thrive at intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels because of those differences. Although the benefits of dialogue as a pathway to authentic interfaith and intercultural communities are well documented, dialogue is not easy to develop and sustain within complex systems, such as healthcare and higher education. Thus, when dialogue as a means for deeper intercultural or interfaith understanding has not been readily agreed to by participants, the challenges met along the dialogic pathway can be difficult to sell. Following a review of the foundational literature pertaining to calling-out and calling-in, this chapter examines the lessons learned from teaching the praxis of calling-in versus calling-out as a starting point for the development and maintenance of dialogue across differences within complex systems.

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INTRODUCTION

Peace and dialogue are not just ideals; they are ways of being. As a way of being, peace has the potential to facilitate and sustain true community and humanizing communication. Grewal (2003) discussed the difference between positive and negative peace approaches. Negative peace is defined narrowly as the absence of violence. Positive peace, on the other hand, anticipates how cultural violence and structural violence can lead to direct violence, and goes further to create systems to dismantle or systematically address the sources of violence that undermine the possibilities for equity, justice, and authentic communities. The former type of peace is pessimistic in orientation, and the latter is optimistic. Central to any shift toward positive peace are the ways in which we communicate with one another and model through each interpersonal encounter our commitment to authentic dialogue. Skilled dialogue (Barrera & Corso, 2003) is an important vehicle that, when practiced within the context of true community, allows us to be responsive to cultural diversity and to collectively move in the direction of positive peace as a way of life.

To consider what constitutes effective dialogue, it is helpful to begin by distinguishing between calling-out and calling-in. The practice of calling-out may not need much introduction; it is used commonly in everyday contexts when we see someone doing something we do not like and we want to point it out in no uncertain terms. Calling-out has also been adopted as one way of addressing cultural insensitivity, bias, and other oppressive behaviors. However, because the stimulus that precedes a call-out is generally experienced as dehumanizing, humiliating, condescending, or dismissive, and as a direct attack on the person’s sense of self, value, inclusion, and safety, the call-out response uses a confrontational style (e.g., “What you said was racist”). Thus, while it brings the issue into the light, it can also elicit a defensive reaction, resulting only in negative peace (e.g., Grewal, 2003). In the context of negative peace, although violence may be avoided, there is still tension between the participants; their relationships has not necessarily been restored, healing processes have not been provided, and the oppressive systems that contributed to the initial incident have not been transformed.

It is important to acknowledge that calling-out is appropriate in certain contexts and under certain circumstances, such as when a violation of civil or human rights has occurred. For example, sexual harassment is illegal, and if someone touches you inappropriately in the workplace, it is absolutely appropriate to call-out that behavior by saying, “Stop touching me; I did not give you permission, and this is sexual harassment.”

Another approach—one that can facilitate positive peace, collective healing, and deeper intercultural and interfaith understanding—is the practice of calling-in. Calling-in contrasts with calling-out in that while the latter involves publicly pointing
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