

FORUM: THE PROCESSES OF DIALOGUE

THE PROCESSES OF DIALOGUE

Participation and Legitimation

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FORUM INTRODUCTION

We both lead research projects funded by the New Zealand government that involve dialogue. Juliet, together with

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Ted Zorn, has a research grant to explore methods of dialogue that could improve the quality of engagement of members of the general public with issues of controversial science. Judy's Sustainable Biotechnology project (<http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/biotech>) examines the socioeconomic and cultural impacts of biotechnology and aims to connect science and society through dialogue processes. These projects have raised a number of questions for us related to the ethics and efficacy of dialogue processes and motivated us to initiate this special forum.

The notion of dialogue has been taken up by scholars and practitioners as a means of curing a range of societal and organizational ills. It is surprising, however, that dialogue has received little attention by organizational/management communication scholars (Bokeno & Gantt, 2000). Furthermore, dialogue is often described uncritically as a panacea without questioning, for example, its potential to disguise covert agendas or power relations. To address some of these issues, we invited several of the most experienced scholars in the field to draw on their own experiences in research and practice and use the forum to share their views with us all.

Our vision was that the forum would comprise three parts. The first part would take the form of an electronic "dialogue on dialogue" between Barnett Pearce, Robert (Bob) Heath, and John Shotter. Each of these scholars and practitioners has extensive experience in dialogue, with each coming from a different perspective: John Shotter brings an interest in the nature of, and conditions for, participatory democracies and civil societies; Bob Heath comes from an extensive background in public relations theory and practice in issues management and stakeholder engagement; and Barnett Pearce has a long history of activity in teaching, research, and facilitation in "dialogic communication" through his university affiliations and his work with Pearce Associates and the Public Dialogue Consortium.

We designed the dialogue on dialogue to focus on a set of questions addressing the relationships between dialogue, organizational communication, ethics, and legitimation. As the dialogue progressed, however, we all realized the difficulties of dialogic engagement by distance and agreed to adopt the term *conversation*

instead. In responding to the questions we put to them, Barnett, Bob, and John explored the nature of dialogue, the legitimation potential of dialogue, the possibilities of dialogue in polarized contexts, and the question of the need to reach resolution in dialogue. What Barnett, Bob, and John achieved in the conversation is a provocative and challenging examination of ethical dimensions of dialogue processes.

The second part of the forum emerges from the conversation as a series of three commentaries from James Taylor, Astrid Kersten, and Ted Zorn, Juliet Roper, and Judy Motion. The commentary authors all have an active interest and participation in issues of dialogue. Astrid is a critical communication scholar who has published work on dialogue and organizational change (Kersten, 2000); James is renowned for his work on the communicative properties of organizing (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Ted and Juliet both come from a background of teaching conflict management and negotiation and have been investigating dialogue in the context of controversial science (Zorn, Roper, Broadfoot, & Weaver, in press). Judy draws on critical discourse analysis approaches to examine the communication and engagement processes during societal controversies (see, e.g., Motion, in press).

In this section, the authors respond to the issues raised by Barnett, Bob, and John and draw on their own particular dialogue research and practice. They all emphasize the relevance and importance of context, power relations, and change dynamics in dialogue processes.

The third part of the forum is an article by Stan Deetz, a leading organizational communication scholar who has advocated dialogue as a key practice in creating more ethical workplaces (Deetz, 1995). Stan's closing reflections offer another constructive theoretical perspective that serves to reopen the dialogue. The challenge now for communication scholars is to develop innovative theoretically and empirically based research into dialogue issues.

Juliet Roper
Judy Motion
Guest Forum Editors

THE CONVERSATION

Juliet and Judy:

From your perspective, what is dialogue and what constitutes successful, ethical processes for dialogue?

John:

To enter into truly dialogically structured relations with others is not that easy—quite a number of detailed features are at stake, having to do with the many spontaneous, nonconscious activities that occur between us and our surroundings by virtue of our relating to them as living bodies (rather than as cause-and-effect mechanisms).

I first began to study what I originally called “joint action” (see Shotter, 1980). As I saw it, joint action occurred when, as infants, those around us called out from us spontaneous responses to their actions and then acted toward us as if we ourselves had performed certain actions on our own!

As I originally saw it, joint action had two major features:

1. As people coordinate their activity with the activities of others, and “respond” to them in what they do, what they as individuals desire and what actually results in their exchanges are often two very different things. In short, joint action produces unintended and unpredictable outcomes.
2. Although such a setting is unintended by any of the individuals within it, it nonetheless has an intentional quality to it: It seems both to have a content, as well as to indicate or to be related to something other than or beyond itself (i.e., participants find themselves immersed in an already given situation, but one with a horizon to it that makes it open to their actions). Indeed, its organization is such that the practical-moral constraints (and enablements) it makes available to them influence (i.e., invite and motivate) their next possible actions.

On moving from England to Holland and encountering Bakhtin’s (1986) work, I began to talk and write instead of “the dialogical.” This was not a major shift, but it did introduce many subtleties, especially an increased emphasis on both spontaneously

responsive and spontaneously anticipatory activities. As Bakhtin put it,

From the very beginning, the utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions, for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created. As we know, the role of the others for whom the utterance is constructed is extremely great. . . . From the very beginning, the speaker expects a response from them, an active responsive understanding. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response. (p. 94)

Barnett:

I take a Buberian perspective in which dialogue consists of a quality of relationship and engagement. Buber (1970) used a series of metaphors, including remaining in the tension between standing your own ground and being profoundly open to the other; treating the other as “thou” rather than “it,” and walking the “narrow ridge” between excessive concern for self and excessive concern for the other. In a similar vein, my colleague, Stephen Littlejohn (personal communication), taught me the phrase *speaking so that others want to listen; listening so that others want to speak*.

One of the implications of this perspective is that the criteria for successful, ethical processes come from within rather than somewhere outside the communicative process itself. That is, there is no generalized definition of *good* that provides criteria to be met; rather, the criteria stem from the quality of the engagement.

It may be difficult to say, in linear decontextualized print, what dialogue is and should be, but it is usually easy to spot in practice. Let me give some examples, noting that no example is or should be evaluated by the criteria appropriate for a textbook definition. In 1957, Martin Buber and Carl Rogers met in a public debate at the University of Michigan. Before the debate, Buber was very skeptical and had said, in print, that one could not be “in dialogue” in public. After the debate, he said that to his surprise, he was in dialogue with Rogers. The criterion: He found himself saying things that he did not expect to say.

Finally, John made an extremely important point when he said (as I would paraphrase him, anyway) that communication is always unfinished, fluid, and shape changing; it is always at the border-

lines between that which we can control and that which we cannot; and it is a process that shapes us as much as we shape it. We should preface any answers to the questions with a phrase something like "from one perspective we might say."

Bob:

One of the most affective advocates of dialogue, Buber (1965) featured the preposition *between*. Taken this way, dialogue is

both a quality of relationship that arises, however briefly, between two or more people and a way of thinking about human affairs that highlights their dialogic qualities. Dialogue can identify the attitudes with which participants approach each other, the ways they talk and act, the consequences of their meeting, and the context within which they meet. (Cissna & Anderson, 1998, p. 64)

Dialogue, as viewed by Buber, depends on whether the participants have "in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turn to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between" (p. 19) themselves and the others.

One of the key elements of dialogue is "between." Buber's work is alive with insights. I think the essence of his ideas boils down to a mutuality of regard and interest. To me, the two concepts are separable and sometimes even at odds with one another. One of the difficulties of dialogue is the feeling, sometimes rightly so, that one's side is the superior one. Can we suspend that feeling as we engage in dialogue?

One can argue that dialogue is ethical and potentially effective when one asks the other person to examine the worthiness of a claim held dear by the one inviting the examination. If, as Barnett challenged, we must communicate to invite others to listen and speak, we may do that with an honest commitment to invite the examination of our own ideas. We should be bold in asserting the idea with its proof, but do so for examination. We could aim to engage in a kind of persuasion where the merit of a case and the quality of the process can lead either side and perhaps both sides to cocreate a shared understanding that is superior to what either had held dear before the discourse. In this sense, the invitation is to "go

beyond" the limits of the current case to see whether some other case has more merit.

In that case, I think that ethics and effectiveness presume the ability of the participants to achieve between—a true state of mutuality of commitment and interest to a joint cocreation rather than a predetermined outcome. Industry, for instance, as is true of activists, have a hard time engaging in dialogue because they want as a precursor an outcome favorable to them and their interests. I know of one company that says during a controversy, let us agree on the means by which a decision will be achieved. For instance, then, a case might focus on potential (alleged) contaminated water. The company says, let us get facts. Let us agree on a consulting company. Let us put our efforts into getting one that can produce sound science that we can live with rather than presuming that dialogue or debate will come down to our expert witness against your expert witness. If agreement is reached, the company pays for the study that is open to the scrutiny of the activists. Then, both sides must agree to the outcome. That is often difficult because it presumes that one side or interest may prevail.

Juliet and Judy:

Some critics say that *dialogue* is a label used to legitimate other communicative processes (e.g., consultation, placation) rather than a sincere engagement with stakeholder issues. What more would we need to know to determine if, in any given case, dialogue masks other communication processes?

Barnett:

There are some clear cases in which this criticism is true. Here is an example. There was a terrible incident in a city in California in which two White policemen killed a Black man suspected of a relatively minor crime. The official story was that the policemen acted correctly, that this was a sad event, and so forth. Shortly after, the two policemen were given awards as the outstanding officers of the year. The community erupted with daily protests outside city hall and the police station, inflammatory editorials in the local media, and so on. The mayor and city manager contacted my nonprofit group, the Public Dialogue Consortium, and asked us to help by

designing a "public dialogue process" that would lead to a reduction of tension in the community.

We did not have any difficulty deciding that this was an instance in which *dialogue* was used to label a *public relations* effort. We asked two questions based on our understanding of Buber's (1970) description of remaining in the tension between standing your own ground and being profoundly open to the other. Would they (mayor and city manager) personally participate in the dialogues? How would they respond if the dialogues increased the tension and identified additional problems that the city should address? When they said that they would not participate and that they wanted us to design the process to assure that the outcome reduced tension, we told them that we would have no part of the process as it was designed.

Again, I think that discerning counterfeits of dialogue comes best from a trained judgment based on experience than from a list of discriminating features. At any given point when negotiating with a client, the meaning of what we are contemplating is unfinished and multiple. I assume that the client really does have a predetermined outcome in mind and is committed to an open-ended process that might not lead to that outcome. In addition to detecting these counterfeit uses, the challenge to us includes being able to act into these emerging situations in such a way as to move them toward completion as dialogue.

I detest the manipulative uses of *dialogue* for all sorts of reasons, not least because they "poison the well" for a form of communication that I personally enjoy and as a citizen and member of society, see as healthful and desperately needed. But I think the answer to the question is better framed in terms of managing tensions among various motives, sorting out the multiple meanings of specific actions, and acting into situations so as to prefigure desirable outcomes rather than, for example, citing a short list of criteria for judging who is sincere and who is not.

Bob:

These options presume that a self-interested intent can be masked into dialogue so that it may advantage one side through masking. One can argue that by definition this is not dialogue but is merely a form of monologue. A key to preventing this form of dis-

course is for both sides to openly and truthfully offer their motives and strategies for examination. Sometimes, we can presume, a side may be engaging in manipulation and placation without even realizing it. That situation may occur when the sense of interest by one party blinds it to its own righteousness.

Juliet and Judy:

How can we establish dialogue in contexts that are already highly polarized and where the cultural value system seems to point much more in the direction of debate and difference?

Barnett:

I do not believe that dialogue is a panacea for all problems. I do not think that dialogue is an available option for all people at all times in all situations. There are several factors that favor debate (in the invidious sense of that term) and unproductive conflict, including tradition and an overwhelming preponderance of models, lack of personal development on the part of the participants, low amounts of self-interested motivation to experiment with different forms of communication, the power of various dialogue-stopping statements and actions, and the sheer difficulty of coordinating social interaction in this complex form of communication.

That said, I am surprised and amazed by how successful various groups have been in establishing dialogue in contexts that seem so unpropitious. I am thinking of the Sustained Dialogue projects led by Hal Saunders and Phil Stuart (<http://www.sustaineddialogue.org/>), the work by the Public Conversations Project (<http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/index.asp>), and some of the work done by the Public Dialogue Consortium (see Spano, 2002).

I deliberately chose these three projects because they all have been successful and they come from very different intellectual starting points: public policy/diplomacy, family therapy, and communication theory, respectively. They work in very different ways: The Sustained Dialogue and Public Conversations projects have conversations in private about public issues; the Public Dialogue project features meetings to which everyone is invited. Public Conversations and Public Dialogue rely on highly skilled facilitation, carefully crafted questions, and strategically designed meetings,

whereas Sustained Dialogue rejects “facilitation” in favor of “moderators” and emphasizes the need for the participants to do the work themselves. There are some common features: inclusion of all (or as many as possible) of the stakeholders; deep engagement of the participants as persons, not just as spokespersons and very clearly not as spokespersons for others not present; an emphasis on listening as well as speaking; situations constructed (in quite different ways) to permit, encourage, and invite speaking from the heart rather than mouthing slogans; and commitment to the process rather than to any predetermined notion of what that process will produce.

In my humble opinion, the questions of whether we can construct a powerful invitation for dialogue, and whether dialogue can happen even among those seemingly unprepared for it, have been answered, and the answer is yes! Not always and certainly not immediately, and one size does not fit all, but after all is done and said, yes! And we as a community of practitioners have an array of ways of doing this that extend beyond the knowledge of any one of us. Of course, more research and experimentation and reflective analysis of our experience need to be done, but this question seems successfully answered.

The more pointed question, to my mind, is if dialogue should break out in such situations, do the people with the power to veto the results care? I have the privilege of being a faculty member of a graduate certificate program in dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement offered by Fielding Graduate University (<http://www.fielding.edu>). The crucial role of a “champion” was one of the learnings that I took away from our “capstone meeting” where participants reported their projects. Repeatedly, we heard of projects successful in bringing about what anyone would call successful, ethical dialogue, but only sometimes did the results of that dialogue make a difference. The most important variable seemed to be someone of sufficient power in the institution/organization involved who could shelter the process and see to it that its results were implemented.

Bob:

To be successful, people need to know and willingly participate in dialogue. That requires trusting a system or process and one’s

role in that process or system. Thomas Jefferson said that the more time spent deciding how a decision can be achieved, the more likely that a decision will be achieved that satisfies those engaged. I think there is a lot of wisdom in that philosophy. For instance, I think that people revere dialogue, in part because they believe it will produce outcomes that satisfy them. Jefferson believed in government—even debate. I for one do not believe that dialogue precludes debate. Debate is propositional discourse, but so too is dialogue. To this end, I believe that an issue is a contestable matter of fact, value, or policy. Thus, we consider the merit of propositions relevant to the type of decision and the context in which that decision is made. Debate seems to get a bad rap because people see it as win-lose, but I think that if debate sharpens the understanding of a proposition and its merits, that in fact is dialogue. Otherwise, I fear that dialogue is placid discourse destined to work only when little is at stake. Also, I think that we cannot suspend interest, desire for control, exertion of power, and even manipulation from the process. That does not mean that dialogue can exist if one or more persons is being manipulative, but dialogue cannot ignore that manipulation may exist and that it can therefore be reined in. Thus, we need systems that may be idiosyncratic to each context that satisfies the needs of the persons engaged. Before the issue is broached, attention needs to be given to how the issue will and can be broached in a productive manner. Then maintenance needs to occur to keep the process true to the end. One of the impediments to dialogue is the tendency for people to believe that they can guide, manipulate, and shape the process to achieve the outcome they prefer from the start. Inability to suspend outcome to focus on process, then, seems to be one of the key starting points.

Barnett:

Bob, I was struck by your comments about debate getting a bad rap and having positive values. But I am also very aware of the difference between my experience when I am debating and when I am in dialogue. And so I was struck by your phrase, “One of the most affective advocates of dialogue, Buber (1965) featured the preposition *between*.” I am not trying to play word games here, but what do you think about the relationship between dialogue and advocacy? Is it a contradiction in terms to “advocate dialogue”? Are they sepa-

rate but both valuable forms of communication? Do they have a more complex relationship?

Bob:

I think that we have to come to terms with advocacy as part of dialogue. Is dialogue nonpropositional? I think that advocacy brings up the aura of being an advocate for change and for what Karl Wallace would call the rhetoric of good reasons. I am not sure I have an answer to this but think that line of concern is essential to our dialogue on dialogue. What is dialogue about? What is its form as well as content? Finally, are we not "advocating" the consideration of the virtues of dialogue as a constructive means for resolving differences of all sorts?

Barnett:

Bob, one way of understanding what you have said is that the search for "pure" forms of dialogue might be unrealistic and unproductive and that we should expect dialogue-in-practice to be in tension with other motives and so forth. If that is a fair paraphrase, in my words, of what you said . . . then I agree. I have been part of some multiyear public dialogue projects in which there were very few moments during which someone looking for pure moments of dialogue would say "That's it!" and yet, in my judgment anyway, the whole process was dialogic.

So I wonder what you think might be a surer way to make the judgment, in specific instances, that something like "genuine" dialogue rather than some manipulative counterfeit, is occurring?

Bob:

My sense is that dialogue is a special form of communication that also has special content. By *special*, I merely mean distinguishing. That is to say, we should be able to know when we are in dialogue or when we are not.

Now, dialogue can be purely relational communication. Or perhaps it can be a superior form that allows us to make joint decisions that truly reflect the merits of some problem and solution rather than privileging one side that might be more clever or more powerful than another. Is that a safe assumption?

Dialogue seems to be challenging because it asks us to be less human, less partisan. John suggests that dialogue is that childlike discourse where I assume we want to inquire and share for the sheer joy of doing so. We come to the inquiry with openness rather than in a partisan manner.

In that case, the preparation for dialogue or the discovery that we are in dialogue is a challenge. It presumes some innocence, some intimate awareness of others that stresses between. I think that, for me, is the hardest part of what I think the adventure entails. I think that one of the reasons for partisan defensiveness that seems to limit the occurrence and working of dialogue comes from feelings of losing "defense." That also entails losing the feeling of attack and victory.

Is openness and innocence an essence of dialogue?

Barnett:

As I read Bob's comments, I was struck by this phrase: "Dialogue seems to be challenging because it asks us to be less human, less partisan." This struck me so hard that I misread it the first time; I read it as "more human, less partisan."

And this made me reflect a bit on what we mean by *human*. What would happen if we used the term *human* normatively, as describing "us" at our best, capable of more than usual empathy and compassion, within the span of our compassion?

For me, it is hard to extend this compassion of fellow-humaneness to those I see systematically dismantling many of the things I love most about my country, but this is one of the learning edges for me. To see even them as doing the best they know how, given what they know and think. . . .

Is there something of a dialogic spirit in that?

Bob:

We should be more human to be open to others' ideas and concerns, but we may in troubled times be less human because it is so easy to be partisan. We tend to look for the quality of our ideas and deny that in others with whom we disagree. Can we hear and listen to others neutrally? As I have thought about this matter, it seems that we may have several opportunities for dialogue, perhaps simultaneously.

One level or context of dialogue is internal. In a book I wrote, in part dedicated in spirit to Pearce/Cronin's notion of the undirected play, I suggested that narratives exist at several levels: internal individual level, departmental level, unit level, organizational level, and societal level. Thus, the work performance of each individual has something to do with her or his thoughts as well as knowledge and understanding (perhaps agreement) with the narrative in the immediate work group, the department, the organization, and the society. What does "society" say about the industry, the company, work, products, and so forth?

The second context is the interaction, dialogue, between individuals. It seems that controversy can be healthy to dialogue if it is genuine and fruitful to some shared positive outcome. I am struck that controversy—clash of propositions—between friends (for instance) can be much more a solid dialogue than is some more innocuous conversational engagement.

The third level/context would seem to be at some subunit of society, an organization, for instance. In this situation, we may be in dialogue to some large extent (a) to which we know that a dialogue exists, although we are perhaps only minimally involved personally; and (b) where we may be represented by others who are more engaged.

Finally, the dialogue exists at a county, region, religion, global, and so forth level. We see the dialogue in passing and maybe do not even know the persons who are engaged in the dialogue. They are surrogates for us. We might see this dialogue as reported or even witness it as part of viewing Senate debate or hearings. We may passionately think about this dialogue and even engage at our level with others on the "larger" dialogue. It causes us to experience our internal dialogue.

John:

I think that a most important aspect of dialogue is its potential to inspire the unique and the creative. Indeed, a most crucial aspect of all unfolding, back-and-forth, dialogical relations is that as respective speakers finish, they spontaneously engender both within themselves and their listeners a sense of where they now all stand and an anticipatory sense of what next is needed to continue their conversation (assuming all has gone well and they have not con-

fused or bewildered their addressees). Thus, two or more people together can do something in their con(withness)-versing(crossing) in relation to a topic (topos = space) that (at least initially) is impossible for them to do apart. For what a differently positioned listener can do for a speaker from within the con-versing movement of a dialogue is to respond to their voicing of it in a way that is not only intelligible but also differently oriented. It is this that makes dialogue both creative of unique possibilities and able to give us access to previously unencountered realities.

Juliet and Judy:

At this closing stage of the conversation, we would like to ask, Is it possible or desirable to reach a resolution in dialogue? If so, how?

Bob:

I think that dialogue is like communication. The constitutive view is that meaning is the residue of the process, so that it is likely to continue as people reflect on the dialogues in which they participate. Also, each dialogue or phase of a dialogue is just that. As communication never really starts or stops, I would argue that dialogue does not either. Dialogues can become parts of other dialogues.

One of the themes that seems to run through dialogues is respect/regard. As long as we engage in respect/regard for others, as persons and as holders of ideas and feelings, I think that we are joined in various ways and to varying degrees of enrichment. To return to one of the opening moments in this exchange, the desire to listen and learn is perhaps the essential part of giving regard and respect.

Barnett:

This is a good question, and I would like to share some thoughts about it. In fact, it makes me smile, because this question gets at the magic and mystery and power of dialogue.

Let me first say that most of my work is in public settings, dealing with groups who have reciprocally defined each other as the enemy and have a history of clashing with each other about some controversial topic.

From my experience, I know that it is very difficult to come to any "resolution" (whatever that might mean) without dialogue. If we try, we simply reproduce the same old pattern of (choose your label) reciprocated diatribe, debate, moral conflict, and so forth in which positions harden, discourse attenuates, and words are used as swords and clubs rather than invitations.

And one of the defining and most important characteristics of dialogue is that achieving resolution cannot be the primary purpose or highest context of the interaction.

The secret or magic or mystery is that in situations like the ones I described above, we are much more likely to achieve resolution when we give up trying for it; when we quit focusing on the issue and engage with the other person(s) as thou.

There is something powerful in dialogue that is not intended to produce resolutions of conflict but that increases the possibility that we will. When we are in dialogic relationships with others, we can develop much richer relationships and in those relationships, can be weaned from obsessive connections with our own "positions" and so forth. And in this sense of greater humanity (to refer back to our previous conversation), new things are possible.

So resolutions in dialogue have a sense of having "just happened" rather than being arrived at by means of great struggle—of being an accident or fortuitous or the product of a power greater than ourselves.

COMMENTARIES ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ONLINE DIALOGUE

JAMES R. TAYLOR: DIALOGUE OR TRIALOGUE? IS INTERSUBJECTIVITY CORRELATED WITH ANTISUBJECTIVITY?

Our next-door neighbors, who have three young sons aged 10 to 12, travel a lot. They have been to South and Central America and to Europe. The other day, Anthony said to his mother, Martine, "Mum, everywhere we go people are nice to us and treat us well.

They are friendly. And we are polite and nice to them. Why are there wars?" Martine confessed to us she was stumped. The best she could answer was that many people do not ever get the chance to discover how other people live, and so they do not understand them and come to see them as hostile.

Young Anthony's question is a good one. I work in the area of organizational communication and I have often been baffled by the incapacity of well-meaning and conscientious people to resolve the tensions that arise from collaborative work. Recently, for example, we (Elizabeth Van Every and myself) did extensive interviewing in the case of a national police force that had embarked on an ambitious project to upgrade its internal communication system. The project was elaborately planned, corresponded to a real need, had adequate funding, and hired the world's most famous hi-tech developer. Yet 5 years later, the project had foundered. The press had a field day. It became a national laughingstock. The more we interviewed, the clearer it became that the problems, from the beginning, could be traced back to one failed transaction after the other. The system architects wrangled with the representatives of the technology company. The in-house telecom service turned recalcitrant. The information technology chief, hired for the project, became a bitter enemy of the project chief. Inside management, there were factions within factions. The Police Brotherhood, initially sympathetic, became bitter opponents. And the problems hardly stopped there. There were divisions in the government Cabinet of the day. The hi-tech company had its own internal tensions.

It is ironic that the one place where there was a genuine dialogue was in the development team itself, where cops and hackers, after a fairly uncomfortable initiation, created a real dialogue and actually got the job done. They never got any credit because by the time the system actually became operational, sadly enough, the game was up. Their very success as a team seemed, indeed, to be part of the problem: The more they bonded, the more intense the opposition to and rejection of their work was elsewhere in the organization.

When I think about dialogue, this is the background I have in mind. What, I ask myself, can I learn from the literature on dialogue that would enlighten me on the sources of the "miniwars" that break out in what are supposed to be harmonious organizations,

such as the notoriously quasi-military management typical of police administration?

One of the things I really liked about the online dialogue was the recognition that people who interact with each other about intensely valued objects have to tread a delicate knife-edge. I found none of the mystification that sometimes transpires in discussions of dialogue. Good sense characterizes the whole discussion. Given limitations of space, let me pick only one point (among many) that stood out for me. I was intrigued by Bob Heath's remarks on debate. As he said, dialogue should not preclude the sharpening of issues that arises from debate. I think Bob Heath is right. All too often a supposed dialogue is little more than "placid discourse." But I am less sure than he is, in the context I have been describing, that by "putting their spirit and interest into dialogue" the police would have resolved their difficulties.

I believe in dialogue. I would not want to live in a society without dialogue.

And yet . . . ?

Theodore Caplow's (1968) book *Two Against One* begins this way: "A *triad* is a social system containing three related members in a persistent situation. . . . This essay is an attempt to demonstrate that triads are the building blocks of which all social organizations are constructed" (p. 1). Caplow went on to argue that "the most significant property of the triad is its tendency to divide into a coalition of two members against the third" (p. 2).

I know. I understand that assuming the basis of society to be triadic is a hypothesis, a postulate, a premise, whatever. The problem is that the focus on the dyad that dialogism brings with it as part of its conceptual baggage is also a postulate, a hypothesis. I think of it as the cognitivist premise because it highlights, above all, mutual understanding. The fact that cognitivist epistemology has a long history in European thought, all the way back to Descartes ("I think therefore I am"), does not make it more convincing to me. In fact, it is believing that we could overcome conflicts if only we could think or feel ourselves into someone else's head space that makes me suspicious. Beware your prejudices, I say to myself! They lead to lazy thinking.

There are two factors that give me pause. The first is that the triadic hypothesis fits with the data we collected for our study of the

police information technology project. It makes sense of the accounts we heard. Much more so, I have to admit, than our previous assumption of dyadic co-orientation. But then, I tell myself, that is not surprising because our data consist of verbal after-the-fact accounts, and we know from our reading of narrative theory (Taylor & Cooren, in press; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) that in story logic, a correlate of all intersubject relationship is a (perhaps tacit) *antisubject* relationship: a protagonist-antagonist polarity. This feature of narrativity, however, is what motivates a second reservation.

Karl Weick (1995) has written that "experience as we know it exists in the form of distinct events. But the only way we get this impression is by stepping outside the stream of experience and directing attention to it" (p. 25). The "stepping outside" is accomplished, Weick also observed, by making a "discursive construction" (p. 20), narrative in origin (p. 127). It follows that how we narrativize experience determines what the experience is to start with. Anthony Giddens (1984) made much the same point: "Acts' are constituted only by a discursive moment of attention to the *durée* of lived-through experience" (p. 3). Rationalizing one's own and others' actions is, Giddens observed, "a routine characteristic of human conduct, carried on in a taken-for-granted fashion" (p. 4). Narratively based interpretations do not, in other words, merely describe experience; they instate it.

If reality is constituted reflexively and retrospectively; if the basis of sense making (Giddens, 1984, called it "interpretation"), as Weick (1995) believed, is narrative; and if narrative has a polemic character (as Greimas, 1987, claimed), then Caplow (1968) was making a justified assumption: In triadic relationships, intersubjectivity correlates with antisubjectivity. And if the triad is the basic social unit, then the same activity that produces dialogue will generate animosity and opposition. It boils down then to an issue of what the social unit is. I will prefer the assumption that seems to best illuminate my data. At the moment, the triadic hypothesis fits better than the dyadic.

Buber's (1970) famous paradigm is I-thou-*it*. Caplow (1968) advanced, as I understand him, an alternative formulation: I-thou-*he/she* (or *they*). An I-thou dialogue, if culminated, implies an inclusion. It joins people in a common space of understanding. The

Caplow hypothesis (and narrative theory) leads to the prediction that this inclusion will be correlated with an exclusion: a *we—not he/she (or not they)*. The organizational implications of this are far reaching, I would suggest. What the Caplow hypothesis implies, if we expand the context, is that there will be no permanent equilibrium in human affairs that are interconnected in a larger network of relationships. “Organizing” (to use Weick’s, 1979, term) has, Sisyphus-like, no ultimate closure.

I do not want to be understood as arguing against dialogue. Resorting to dialogue rather than war has been, I believe, the mark of civilization ever since the golden age of Greek democracy. It is an attitude, and a skill, that needs to be learned, beginning in the family (a functional family, after all, is a lifetime dialogue). It is (or should be) part of a culture—*our* culture.

What I really appreciated about the online exchange was that none of the participants made any exaggerated claims for dialogue. As Barnett Pearce put it, dialogue is not a panacea for all problems. Other factors need to be taken into account, such as the role of champions. It is not even always easy, all agreed, to demarcate authentic dialogue from its many synthetic substitutes (Barnett provides a nice example in the case of a mayor and city manager). It is, after all, easy to claim one is open to dialogue and by doing so, evade the necessity to change.

Dialogue is an element of social existence, and an important one, but we also need to bear in mind, as the discussion made clear to me, the context in which it occurs. Including, I would add, the place of dialogue in a larger network of organizational relationships.

ASTRID KERSTEN: DIALOGUE AS STRUGGLE

The need for dialogue is evident everywhere. Many parts of the world are experiencing increasing hostility and fragmentation and in the United States, the level of political polarization has reached a new “high.” The *Christian Science Monitor* series “Talking With the Enemy” (2004) emphasizes both the need to keep talking and the depth of the divide; Americans avoid discussing their differences, said Deborah Tannen (2004), one of the series’ contributors, because they do not want to have “unseemly arguments.” But per-

haps the real problem is not knowing how to dialogue across difference. Instead of dialogue, we practice “‘agonism’: ritualized opposition, a knee-jerk, automatic use of warlike formats” (Tannen, 2004, p. 1). We define an issue by featuring two extreme spokespeople, highlighting opposition, leaving out the middle ground and creating “the illusion of equivalence where there is none.” By focusing on position rather than content, agonism obscures the issue, squashes legitimate dissent, and insists on “balance” when there may be no basis for balance. Tannen’s argument is an important one because it highlights a key problem in dialogue, namely, the assumed neutrality of certain premises, practices, and realities, in this case that of balance.

In the first part of this forum, the contributors painted an appealing picture of dialogue. They outlined inspiring theoretical foundations; highlighted conditions for effective dialogue; identified key parameters such as inclusion, openness, and representation; and created a mood of hope and hopefulness inspired by models of successful dialogue. I like this picture because I believe in the potential of dialogue to create a better understanding of others and ourselves and because without dialogue, civilization is not possible. Unfortunately, my own picture is not as bright. To me, dialogue is problematic because truly hearing the voice of the Other involves a struggle against many obstacles. Dialogue in a multicultural society must begin by deconstructing the structural and ideological constraints that shape both reality and dialogue itself. Without such deconstruction, dialogue will merely replicate or aggravate our structural problems and social divides.

In my response, I use my experiences with race dialogue as an example of “dialogue as struggle.” Shipler (1997) noted that

talking about race is one of the most difficult endeavors in America. Shouting is easy. Muttering and whining and posturing are done with facility. But conversing—black with white, white with black—is a rare and heavy accomplishment. The color line is a curtain of silence. (p. 473)

Race dialogue involves a conflict between competing realities in which racial ideology and structural justice collide with a public rhetoric of social equality. It typically suffers from three problems:

(a) inability to see and hear the racial Other, (b) lack of common language and experience, and (c) lack of meaningful action. All three problems are central to the questions posed in this dialogue conversation. I outline what I see as critical deconstruction in race dialogue, drawing on Habermas (1994) and others to show that effective dialogue requires a critique of reality and a critique of social practices within that reality (Kersten, 2000).

The first requirement for race dialogue is a *recognition* of the structural and ideological context of racism. Living in a society where differences of class, political power, social status, and safety are all related to race, the presumption of color blindness—"We are all equals here"—is more damaging than the explicit recognition and thematization of existing discriminatory relationships. Because contextual relations of inequality define and shape the position of the parties in the dialogue, the process is subject to systematic distortion and false legitimation:

Insofar as the bracketing of social inequalities in deliberation means proceeding as if they don't exist when they do, this does not foster participatory parity. On the contrary, such bracketing usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates. In most cases, it would be more appropriate to unbracket inequalities in the sense of *explicitly thematizing them* [italics added]—a point that accords with the spirit of Habermas' later "communicative ethics." (Fraser, 1990, p. 64)

Second, effective dialogue assumes three things: (a) that participants have the capacity to understand and acknowledge their own worldview and express it competently, (b) that participants are able to understand the worldview of the Other, and (c) that through discourse, participants develop common language and common ground. This is much easier said than done. Whites and Blacks (and other racial minorities) have very different experiences when it comes to race issues, so there is an immediate gap between lifeworlds. For Blacks, race and racism are dominant parts of everyday life that shape identity, experience, and relationships. They operate through structural patterns of exclusion and marginalization and through ideological processes of perception and reality construction. For Whites, on the other hand, race and racism exist outside of everyday experience and awareness—not

only are they rarely recognized or problematized (Essed, 1992) but also the existence of racism is actively denied both at the individual and at the societal level. For Blacks to participate in society, they must reproduce "White consciousness" and find their own reality continuously contested in everyday interactions, whereas Whites can assume the naturalness of their own reality without consequences or repercussions: "Being white (is) the invisible norm for how the dominant culture measures its own civility" (McClaren, 1991, p. 244).

A White reality that denies racism will preempt meaningful dialogue because this reality invalidates the Other. Race dialogue, therefore, does not mean merely coming to the table; it means coming to terms with the social, cultural, and political hegemony of "Whiteness" as a *precondition* for racial dialogue. It also means being informed about the experience of the Other. In a society where the validity of the Black experience is constantly contested, Whites enter the dialogue expecting to be educated. In reality, dialogue imposes a moral obligation to come to the table prepared, that is, multiculturally literate (Fraser, 1990), able to hear and engage in discourses fundamentally different from our own. Common ground and common interests are established, then, not by assumption, neutrality, or objectivity but rather, by a transformed perspective of one's world that incorporates a "radical plurality" (Ramsey, 1998).

Third, we must critically deconstruct the dialogue process itself to become aware of the many ways in which discourse norms are contaminated by White standards and practices, bringing into question our cultural construction of "competent participants." Race dialogue often shuts down when the discourse becomes "too" emotional, direct, aggressive, personal, irrelevant, unstructured, historical, or unproductive in the judgment of White participants, judgments that more often than not directly reflect White (male) discourse norms. Here, "respect" and "regard" involve challenging one's comfort level:

Full public recognition as equal citizens may require two forms of respect: (1) respect for the unique activities of each individual, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity; and (2) respect for those activities, practices and ways of viewing the world that are particu-

larly valued by, and associated with, members of disadvantaged groups. (Gutmann, 1994, p. 8)

Any dialogue form that implicitly or explicitly reproduces the dominant culture and structure of racism will reproduce the very relations it seeks to address. As Habermas (1994) commented, "A correctly understood theory of rights requires a *politics of recognition* that protects the integrity of the individual in the life contexts in which his or her identity is formed" (p. 113).

Finally, race dialogue must be connected to meaningful action. Although we may often feel that getting to a place of understanding is in itself an accomplishment, it is not sufficient and in fact, with time, it becomes tiresome—yet one more dialogue in which one more small group of White people acquires some small understanding of minority problems. Barnett rightly pointed to this when he mentioned the importance of involving people with "sufficient power . . . [to] shelter the process and see to it that its results were implemented." Effective race dialogue among well-meaning but powerless participants accomplishes only interpersonal results, not the structural changes that must be effected if dialogue is to be truly successful.

TED ZORN, JULIET ROPER, AND JUDY MOTION: WHAT ARE WE REALLY TRYING TO DO? ACHIEVING LEGITIMACY AND CLOSURE IN DIALOGUE

There are many provocative insights for us in the dialogue conversation, and we are grateful to John, Bob, and Barnett for these. In this brief essay, we focus on two key issues that are raised for us when we reflect on the goals of this *Forum* and the dialogue conversation in the context of these projects. Both issues are closely connected to the purposes, goals, or outcomes that dialogue practitioners and stakeholders understand to be valid in saying that dialogue processes are being used. One of these key issues involves the perception of dialogue as a legitimate process for addressing controversial issues; the other, closely related issue is the concept of closure through dialogue. Specifically, we first address the challenges of enacting legitimate dialogue and second, the concerns regarding

reaching some sense of closure or goal attainment as a result of dialogue processes.

The Problem of Legitimacy

There are at least two closely related issues in constructing dialogue practice that are considered legitimate for key stakeholders. The first is the problem of agreeing on what constitutes dialogue and what differentiates it from other forms of communication. The second is the problem of hidden motives.

It can be maddening to attempt to discern from the literature what practices enable or constitute dialogue. Dialogue often seems to be more a commitment to a set of values than a coherent set of concrete practices. In the conversation on dialogue, Barnett said, "I think that discerning counterfeits of dialogue comes best from a trained judgment based on experience than from a list of discriminating features." There is a part of us that sympathizes with his perspective. Indeed, an unreflective application of mechanical criteria or formulas for dialogue is certainly not advisable. However, we are also concerned that "I know it when I see it" is not terribly helpful to people attempting to learn, practice, or research dialogue, so we see a need for scholars to engage with practice and the various theoretical perspectives to work toward articulating its core features. We agree with Bob in saying that "we should be able to know when we are in dialogue or when we are not." We should be able to say that dialogue embodies particular practices and goals and that these differentiate it from other forms of communication. For example, many writers have agreed that dialogue must embody practices such as a reasonably balanced degree of inquiry and advocacy, along with a substantial amount of explicit reflection (April, 1999; Bronn & Bronn, 2003; Burson, 2002).

In a similar manner, we ought to be able to say with some confidence what goals are compatible with dialogue (we address this issue in our discussion of closure).

The second legitimacy concern is the problem of hidden motives. For Ted and Juliet's project, the New Zealand government's Ministry of Research, Science and Technology specified that we focus our experimentation with dialogue on the issue of human biotechnology. Much of the literature on dialogue would

suggest that the aim of such a directive would be to foster mutual understanding without necessarily increasing acceptance, and yet one would wonder, as we did, whether it would be likely that an elected government would invest in such an ambivalent objective.

As Barnett and Bob agreed, "We should expect dialogue-in-practice to be in tension with other motives." Because we were concerned with just such tensions, before accepting the funding, we directly asked the Ministry whether or not they wanted us to help change people's opinions regarding human biotechnology. We also asked what they would do if our experimentation with dialogue resulted in, for example, a less favorable attitude—in line with John's comment that joint action, or dialogue, "produces unintended and unpredictable outcomes." Our questions paralleled those Barnett asked the mayor and city manager of a Californian city: "How would they respond if the dialogues increased the tension and identified additional problems that the city should address?" With assurances that we were not being asked to be agents of opinion change and that unintended outcomes would be dealt with if they arose, we proceeded with the project.

In spite of governmental assurances to us as researchers, however, the tensions remain. The word *dialogue* in research such as ours has been adopted only recently. There has been a surge of recent interest in dialogue that suggests that dialogue shares a "fad-dishness" with other management trends that creates certain challenges in its use. For example, although its current fashionableness makes it highly appealing to some, its use is regarded with considerable suspicion by others. In part this is because of the perception that dialogue may be a label used to "dress up" processes such as *consultation*, which is often dismissed because of its frequent use to legitimize and enact predetermined outcomes. Indeed, in Ted and Juliet's project, one participant asked if what we were doing was consultation and if so, she would not take part.

Greenpeace provides a high-profile example of this concern with the potential hidden motives for dialogue. When invited to engage in dialogue with the Life Sciences Network, a pro-science lobby group, Greenpeace refused point blank, stating that dialogue would not be possible. Although Greenpeace representatives have attended dialogue opportunities where they could work directly

with scientists in the past, the disparity of interests, values, and motives of Life Sciences Network was perceived to be insurmountable and Greenpeace did not wish to be seen to be in any way legitimating the position or processes of Life Sciences Network.

Indeed, the risks involved for participants and concerns for hidden agendas in dialogue were ruefully acknowledged and summed by a participant who commented at the end of one of Judy's sessions, "Now the spin doctors know how to get to us." At an interpersonal level, significant self-disclosure had occurred, but sharing ideas created vulnerability and meant that those ideas could be exploited and used to legitimate biotechnology procedures or products that the group did not support.

Also of interest here is that although the stated purpose of dialogue may not be to increase acceptance, it may indeed have that effect. In our research, we found that having members of the public talk on their own about controversial science led them to have more negative views about scientists and heightened concerns about the science (Zorn et al., in press). However, when they engaged in dialogue with scientists, their attitudes toward scientists and the science itself became more positive (Roper, Zorn, & Weaver, 2004).

Closure and Resolution

One of the challenges for dialogue practitioners is the tension between being open to alternative outcomes on one hand and being goal oriented on the other hand. It is apparent from the dialogue conversation that openness to alternative outcomes is an important dimension of dialogue. As John suggested, "Its lack of any predetermined order, and thus its openness to being specified or determined by those involved in it . . . is its central defining feature." And yet, people are often motivated to attempt dialogue in the hope that it will solve a problem or improve on an existing situation. That is, they engage in dialogue with specific outcomes in mind.

How might this tension be resolved? Barnett commented on the magic and mystery and power of dialogue when it succeeds. What makes dialogue truly unique is not the content but the process. Dialogue is relational. It may not result in a solution to the identified problem but rather, in a *relational resolution* that develops from

understanding each other's emotions, values, interests, and positions. Dialogue, in our research projects, is designed to succeed at a relational level. Participants achieve a sense of connection with community members and even adversaries and gain a profound respect for others, their emotional responses, their values and beliefs, and the positions they adopt. In this way, dialogue can go beyond specific problem resolution to achieving social harmony.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

STANLEY DEETZ: DIALOGUE, COMMUNICATION THEORY, AND THE HOPE OF MAKING QUALITY DECISIONS TOGETHER

Let me begin by confessing that I find discussions of dialogue important but frustrating. The call for dialogue became a core part of our sociality in the latter part of the 20th century, and it clearly continues as a social hope as we confront the problems of a new era. We, I think, have entered more an age of negotiation than information. Something like dialogue is certainly critical in our increasingly interconnected and multicultural context. But does the language of dialogue give us the best way to think and talk about both the needs and hopes?

The word *dialogue*, rather than simply *communication* or even *good communication*, draws our attention to specific normative hopes. The term also highlights certain literatures and particular lay and professional understandings of the nature of people and communication and expectations of what might be achieved together. The hopes of different conceptions and practices of dialogue are not all the same, however. As Jen Simpson and I (Deetz & Simpson, 2004) recently developed in some detail, three dominant positions on dialogue evolved in the latter half of the 20th century—liberal humanism, critical hermeneutic, and postmodern. Each has very different goals and conceptions of communication. For example, dialogue programs that aim at greater understanding and, hence, tolerance and conflict reduction, differ from ones

aimed at bringing together distributed expertise to form creative mutual decisions, and they differ from ones in which the encounter with others brings mutual personal and cultural transformation.

Each of the programs associated with the authors in this volume, as well as others such as the Public Conversations Project or the work of Isaacs and Senge in organizations, affiliates with certain aspects of these conflicting traditions. They all may be doing dialogue projects, but they are clearly not doing similar things. The use of the term *dialogue* as a way to pull together people with a family resemblance of hopes often leads us to undertheorize the requisite communication process, reach quick superficial agreements where fundamentally different conceptions drive the work, and collapse together programs that aim at very different accomplishments. It is not so much that we have not defined dialogue, but as Ted, Juliet, and Judy suggested, we need to be clearer as to what we are really trying to do. And I believe that Jim is right: The term *dialogue* directs our attention to concerns with “mutual understanding” and the presumed benefits from its accomplishment.

The works of Pearce and his associates (e.g., Pearce & Littlejohn, 1999; Pearce & Pearce, 2001) and Barge and Little (2002) remain notable exceptions in offering communication theory-based understandings of dialogue. A more developed communication-based conception of dialogue can (a) provide a communication-based understanding of the complex social construction processes of organizational life, (b) direct the evaluation of existing organizational forms and activities, and (c) provide guidance for the education of members and the redesign of organizational structures and practices. We need to look more seriously at what such a theory might entail.

Some things we seem to agree on and some things we do not. In general, we seem to have a lot of agreement on the conditions necessary for dialogue but much less agreement on the outcomes—understanding, creative decisions, or personal transformation—and on the processes of dialogic interaction. The descriptions of the ideal conditions for dialogue to occur are fairly consistent across the humanist to more critical communication scholars including the authors here. At the minimum, we might expect reciprocity of opportunity for expression; some equality in expression skills; the setting aside of authority relations, organizational positions, and

other external sources of power; the open investigations of member positions and “wants” to more freely ascertain their interests; open sharing of information and transparency of decision processes; and the opening of fact and knowledge claims to redetermination based on contestation of claims and of advantaged modes of knowledge creation. In general, power relations are seen as limiting dialogue (except where power enforces positive practices). In general, the orientation is toward mutual understanding and/or mutual decisions rather than strategic self-interest. And in general, little is fixed from the outset, as what is built together is prized over preexisting beliefs and attitudes. Of course, rarely are all these conditions met, thus, some limits must be accepted or overcome in the dialogic process.

Not nearly so much agreement exists regarding the communication processes of dialogue. Some of these differences, as discussed, arise from the very different purposes of dialogue programs. Others differ owing to the different orientations given when the communication theory is grounded in a conflict rather than consensus social theory. Not only have we as professionals not always been clear about the relations among communication theories and contextual purposes but also the wide public in which we work have their own conceptions. Their preferred communication practices seem to be grounded in liberal democratic theory—emphasizing the representation of constituent groups, the sanctity of personal experiences, and everyone having a say. Each of these creates difficulties (Barber, 1984; Cameron, 2000). Contemporary communication theory is often unknown and even antithetical to lay images and expectations but provides possibilities heretofore unavailable to them.

Here is the bind as I see it (which is similar to the presentation by Ted, Juliet, and Judy). Public conception and judgments of legitimacy are based in liberal democratic conceptions of communication. This aligns reasonably well with the hopes of mutual understanding but not with the needs (either in process or purpose) for mutual creative decision processes or investigation of deeper social formations and the politics of personal experience. They may come to tolerate or even respect differences but do not productively engage differences. In Barber’s (1984) sense, liberal democracy is better suited to keep us safely apart than productively together. The “public” understanding of “good” communication is often favored

by powerful groups because it appears democratic by giving a "say" while keeping most groups out of the actual decision process. More knowing groups, therefore, fear legitimating the process and, thus, stay away. Thus, both more and less involvement hampers their interests and the trap is set by the reproduction of liberal democratic theories of communication. Furthermore, most conceptions of dialogue include a relatively weak conception of power. Because of this, many dialogue projects unwittingly reproduce more subtle but dominant and hegemonic power relations (see Bhabha, 1990).

Programs that focus on interested parties jointly making decisions are of much greater value than those that simply give a say or aim at greater understanding. Also, membership based on the diversity of interests of those at the table and discussion processes that encourage emergent solutions are of greater value than those whose members represent external groups and are committed to maintaining positions held by those not at the table. As shown for years by people working with conflict, focusing on outcomes and interests in the interaction is of greater value than focusing on problems and wants and bargaining over preferred solutions. This is especially the case when problems are defined by members as the absence of their preferred solutions. And finally, maintaining conflicts and differences as a positive energy toward creativity is of greater value than seeking common ground and value consensus.

Development of these concepts and practices is aided by talk of dialogue being grounded in an enriched theory of communication. Such a theory focuses on understanding the cultural politics of experience and processes of domination in interaction, has a strong conception of "other" and "otherness," and is grounded in conflict theories. Such a theory helps turn these insights into positive practices.

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