

# Engaging contested community issues

## Community dialogue in one US American community

Natalie J. Dollar

Oregon State University – Cascades (USA)

This article presents an analysis of dialogue as an alternative to debate and argument for engaging contested community issues. Treating dialogue as a communication practice, I draw on ethnography of communication, cultural communication theory, and cultural discourse analysis to describe and interpret how participants practiced community dialogue as a communication event comprised of sequences of listening and verbally responding. When topics and identities were elaborated upon and socially negotiated through personal communication in the form of narratives and emotional responses, participants reported effective dialogue. These sequences were dialogic moments partially due to the dialectical tension between Americans' once predictable civic routine of public expression of individual's beliefs and the process of dialogue featured in our War and Peace dialogue workshop.

**Keywords:** community dialogue, cultural discourse analysis, cultural terms for talk, dialectical tension, listening

### 1. Introduction

Americans have long valued public free expression (Carbaugh 2005), a way of speaking that privileges oral communication over silence, surface-level rather than deep interaction, and brings no obligation for future interaction (Dollar 2019). Americans feel it their right, as citizens, to express their opinions, in private and public scenes, even when these opinions are in opposition to government and the political elite (Bellah et al. 2007; Carbaugh 1996, 2005; Philipsen 1992; Tocqueville 1935/1945). When holding differing views, Americans have turned to deeply felt cultural forms of interaction, such as argument, debate, and deliberation, not only with their close friends and family but also with professional col-

leagues and acquaintances. The concept of dissent, that citizens differ in their views, and should freely express these differences, is a fundamental belief for most Americans. However, how Americans express dissent is being challenged across many USAmerican communities.

In early 2003, I began to hear members of my community asking for a change in how we “talk to one another when we disagree.” I noticed that the small talk conversations characteristic of waiting in lines at grocery stores and the post office, and in waiting rooms at doctors’ offices, for example, were disappearing. Someone said to me, “I haven’t felt this way since Vietnam when I was scared of offending people.” As I listened closely I heard community members advocating for new “ways of enacting their democratic rights.” I felt responsible; as a Communication Studies faculty member and scholar, I felt obligated to help my community. I did not, however, know much about dialogue at the time. What I did know was from my teaching of interpersonal communication.

In response I designed a community dialogue workshop titled *War and Peace: A Dialogue*. I recruited faculty from business, family studies, English, political science, and art to join me as weekly co-facilitators. What we found is that community dialogue afforded this USAmerican community, a city in the Western United States, a means of interacting that differed from what was once predictable public communication, the “deeply felt belief that one can and should speak, one can and should speak about self, its history, experiences, and opinions; and that one should not let others inhibit their willingness to speak in public” (Carbaugh 2005, 22). Participants came to view community dialogue as a communicative event comprised of sequences of listening and verbally responding. When topics and identities were elaborated upon and socially negotiated through personal communication, narratives and emotional responses participants reported effective dialogue. Such moments were temporary partially due to a dialectical tension between once predictable public communication and the process of community dialogue featured in the workshop series.

Simultaneously I initiated the Community Dialogue Project (CDP hereafter) to provide community members with an alternative to debate and argument as the scenes in which we engage those with whom we have difference (<https://osucascades.edu/communication/community-dialogue-project>). Currently, CDP offers community dialogues some of which are being studied by our team including a colleague and undergraduate students researchers and a university course, Community Dialogue, a requirement in Community Development and Leadership option in social science.

The purpose of this study is to examine one community’s attempt to learn and practice community dialogue. I begin with a review of dialogue and community dialogue then introduce the CDP as one type of community dialogue and the

focus of this study. I theoretically situate my study within the ethnography of communication and theory of cultural communication (Philipsen 2002) as a study of meta-communication, specifically “dialogue.” Using cultural discourse analysis I describe and interpret the communication practices, cultural propositions, and cultural premises participants use and activate in this CDP workshop series.

## 2. Literature review

Dialogue research explores the intersections of language, communication, and contexts. Three approaches characterize contemporary dialogue research and are reviewed below, namely normative, descriptive, and a combination of normative and descriptive. Dialogue scholars have developed pedagogy using these approaches. Most relevant to this study are the approaches focusing on community dialogue.

### 2.1 Conceiving dialogue: Normative, descriptive, and beyond

There are distinguishable research lines theorizing language, communication, and dialogue. While an extensive review of the philosophies of dialogue developed in anthropology, communication studies, education, linguistics, literature, pragmatics, and social psychology is beyond the scope of this article, a brief review is necessary (see Anderson et al. 2004; Arnett 2012; Lindell 2017 for detailed reviews). Research into dialogue is often characterized as either descriptive or normative, with the approaches considered incompatible by many.

The varied approaches to defining, studying and practicing dialogue are put on display in two prominent international organizations, namely the Dialogue Society and the International Association for Dialogue Analysis (IADA hereafter), and their publications. Weigand (2017) provided a detailed comparison of the two, noting three important differences. First, the Dialogue Society treats dialogue as a particular type of communication and IADA views all communication to be dialogical. Second is a difference in historical grounding, with the Dialogue Society prioritizing philosophy, theology and hermeneutic studies and IADA concentrating on “dialogue as a linguistic object” (64). Third are methodological differences emerging from theoretical traditions. These differences reflect commitments to the normative, the Dialogue Society, and descriptive, IADA, approaches to studying dialogue. Each of these approaches is outlined next.

The normative, or sometimes called prescriptive account of dialogue draws attention to “the need to make principled choices to help the special kind of contact called dialogue to happen rather than acknowledging the already-given ‘dia-

logic' nature of human reality" (Stewart and Zediker 2000, 227). Buber (1970) and Bohm (1996), although through very different accounts, offer prescriptive approaches contributing to communication researchers' interests in dialogue – interpersonal, organizational, and public. The normative approach treats dialogue as a particular form of communication, in some cases the ideal, preferred form, activating interaction that is free of coercion, open to multiple and differing voices, aimed toward respecting all voices, and about creating new ideas. Buber's "I-Thou" relationship is essential to this way of communicating. A high value is placed on ethics, morality and responsibility. It is from this orientation that much dialogic pedagogy has been developed (Black 2005, 2008; Matusov 2001; Wegerif 2007).

Relational and organizational scholars express concern with the normative or prescriptive focus on 'thinking together' that overlooks, or even ignores, the situatedness of each and every relationship (Barge and Little 2002; Baxter 2011; Létourneau (2017, 2019). Bakhtin's (1986) notion of *heteroglossia* captures a plurality of voices possible in any situation and is essential to descriptive approaches to dialogue. For these scholars, no action or utterance is understandable by itself. Rather it is dependent on communicative partners and the myriad meanings available to those partners in a given situation. Tensions are to be expected, given this diversity. One such tension addresses the desires for unity and for individual expression. Interesting and relevant to this study is that this predicament is captured in Philipsen's (2002) cultural theory of communication. As members of communities engage in meaningful ways, both community and individuality are at play. These members engage their shared speech codes in making in-the-moment choices about how to communicate.

Weigand, a co-founder of IADA, set forth the idea of *language as dialogue* (rather than language as a system of signs) in the early 1980s, when working with Hundsnurscher to discuss linguistics at the University of Munster. Their focus shifted from system to *action*, which Weigand defined as "having a purpose and applying appropriate means to achieve it" (2017, 65). Monologue, within this view of language, consists of action without verbal reactions, actions aimed toward a mental reaction in the listener. In this approach, all language is dialogic and situationally communicated. Highly influenced by speech act theory, Weigand (1989) extended her theorizing to a dialogic speech act theory, and she identified a comprehensive dialogic speech act taxonomy. She further revised her theorizing when "confronted with empiricist analyses of authentic language use at our IADA conferences" to focus on performance and probability instead of conventions and communication competence (2017, 71). Featuring *competence-in-performance*, Weigand continued her revisions producing the theory of dialogue as a mixed game that rests on three assumptions that are compatible with ethnography of

communication, cultural communication theory, and cultural discourse analysis, the theoretical frameworks used in this study.

The first assumption is that integration of contributions from differing theoretical orientations is productive. In other words, “integration is the name of the game” (Weigand 2017, 75). By combining compatible approaches all benefit; integration is not the same as summation. Second, “the complex whole is more than the sum of the parts” (75). The complex whole includes context, expected actions and reactions, unexpected actions and reactions, etc. Finally, “the components can be derived by specialization” (75). These components make up the context, the meanings of actions and reactions, and the momentary engagement of these in situated uses. It is noteworthy that the mixed game model does not distinguish between dialogicality and dialogue, one a way of being, the other a way of interacting, the defining differences across much of the prominent theorizing of dialogue.

Létourneau (2017) is another scholar who makes a convincing case for how the two can actually be viewed as complementary. The normative approach to dialogue is prescriptive, emphasizing what is mandatory. Létourneau extends the normative approach through his practical philosophy discussion to include what is suggested and optional. His argument lies in the distinction of limit cases in which “the valid response to being open to another may be ‘no’; is one able to be thoroughly open to someone who raped them?” So cases exist in which what is expected is subject to conditions; in other words, normative does not mean “imperative in all cases” (242).

## 2.2 Community dialogue pedagogy

Studies of teaching dialogue stretch disciplinary boundaries and take up varied approaches. Broadly situated, dialogue practitioner-scholars tend to focus on the normative approach, treating dialogue as a specific form of communication. The World Café is an example of this approach.

Introduced in 1995 by Issacs and Brown as a conversational leadership program built around conversing and thinking with others, the organization now offers an international curriculum for hosting large group dialogues and includes five parts grounded in Bohm’s normative approach to dialogue: setting, welcome and introduction, small-group rounds, questions, and harvest (Brown and Issacs 2005). The underlying assumption being that if participants correctly implement the five-step process dialogue will occur.

The Public Dialogue Consortium is an example of the descriptive approach to community dialogue formed by Pearce and colleagues (Pearce 2010; Pearce and Pearce 2004; Spano 2001) to collaborate with “government agencies, key

stakeholders and community members using cutting edge communication techniques to move critical public issues toward resolution” (<https://publicdialogue.org/>). The descriptive dimension is engaged from the outset as consultants and facilitators work collaboratively with their clients to “design and guide engagement processes that foster trust and respect, build productive relationships, and focus on desirable outcomes for all members of the community” (<https://publicdialogue.org/>). Considerable time is spent with community members and leaders, separately and together, allowing the design of a context-specific public dialogue partnership responsive to the current and changing environment. Communication skills, such as neutrality and a not-knowing position, and eliciting experience and stories through appreciative inquiry, systematic questioning, and reflecting are used yet not prescriptively. In this way, the Public Dialogue Consortium exemplifies Létourneau’s (2017) point that normative and descriptive approaches can be viewed as complementary.

It is in this spirit that the community dialogue workshop series (CDW hereafter) was developed and is being studied. *Public dialogue* and *CDP community dialogue* differ in that public dialogue is action-oriented, often concerned with policy formation whereas CDP dialogue is process-oriented and concerned with how dialogue can be learned and practiced with the aim of understanding and creating new ideas emergent from the process.

An approach more similar to that used in the current study is Baraldi and Farini (2011) and Baraldi and Iervese’s (2010) studies of dialogic mediation among international students and adult mediators at international adolescent peace promotion camps. Baraldi and Farini (2011) define dialogue as the “communicative creation of space where different perspectives may be explored” (4). In particular I share their claim that to understand dialogue requires “observing specific communication processes in specific social systems” namely the (1) social system in which dialogue is engaged (e.g., political, municipal, educational, legal), (2) cultural patterns of expectations that guide dialogue, (3) organization of the dialogue in the specific context, and (4) design of the facilitator’s actions as part of the overall interaction. Létourneau (2017) refers to this as an approach for “dialogue as an attitude and a practice” (237).

### 3. Theoretical framework

Ethnography of speaking, emerging from cultural anthropology, takes seriously the view of language as culture. Hymes (1962) made clear that speech and speaking were “surrogates for all modes of communication” (24). The approach is now commonly referred to as ethnography of communication or EC and rests on a set

of assumptions (Noy 2017). First, language is inevitably wrapped up with social and cultural life. Language use is an activity one engages in to bring about particular outcomes. Second, language and communication are present in all communities, yet their situated use varies, not only between communities but within communities as well. It is the researcher's task to describe these local scenes and patterns that are eventually used comparatively across communities. Third, EC is "an inter- and multidisciplinary nexus of knowledge and methods" (Noy 2017, 2), blending scientific and humanistic approaches. My introduction to EC came as a communication studies graduate student studying with Philipsen at the University of Washington. It was at this time I learned the rigor essential to empirical qualitative research – creation of a carefully documented and transcribed data set that is called upon for meticulous and thorough descriptive accounting that can then be theoretically interpreted and displayed for the reader.

### 3.1 Terms for talk

The study of meta-communication, including both communicating about communication and terms for describing communication, has been part of EC since its beginnings. Hymes (1962) argued that one means for studying communication as social and cultural life is by attending to the terms community members use to name speech events and acts. Comparing fifty terms for everyday communication and their practices in seventeen communities Carbaugh (1989) formulated a specific method for studying both the "terms people use to talk about their talk – as well as the talk so referenced by those terms" (16). This framework has been used extensively to study Israeli "soul talk," "dugri," and "radio talk" (Katriel 2004); Japanese "kenson" (Hall and Noguchi 1995); ancient Chinese "pure talk" (Garrett 1993); Hungarian "hate speech" (Boromisza-Habashi 2007, 2012); and Columbian "native terms for speech events that involve personal address" (Fitch 1998), for example. Researchers used native languages in conducting these studies. Further, Philipsen integrated the EC SPEAKING framework into his speech codes theory (1997; Philipsen et al. 2005) and theory of cultural communication (2002). Fitch (2003) built on the framework in developing an approach for studying "cultural persuadables" as what is persuadable is assumed to vary both within and across communities. More recently, Carbaugh (2007) has advanced cultural discourse analysis as a methodology for studying speech codes and one of the discursive hubs of focus concerns "discursive terms for communication and the practices of action those terms make relevant" (17). Cultural terms for talk are one of many cultural terms for pragmatic action and are morally infused. In other words, these terms for talk are actions that are heard "to carry weight along a dimension of actions that run from those that are highly valued to those that are actively disval-

ued” (Carbaugh and Sotirova 2015, 4). Studies of cultural terms for talk, the terms and practices, are rendered meaningful on at least four levels – act, event, style, and domain.

Of particular interest for this study is the exploration of listening and metatalk about listening (Agne 2018; Agne and Tracy 2001). In his analysis of the Waco, TX standoff, Agne identified three negotiating functions of metatalk about listening: the relevance of what is worth listening to, fair turns at talking and listening, and the identity of a good listener. These functions, he argues, demonstrate how participants in the hostage standoff treated listening as a competitive activity in which they “twist the goals of strategic listening to their own advantages.” In this, and possibly other contexts, “when listening becomes a problem, deploying a prescribed set of behaviors would not necessarily guarantee good listening has taken place” (370). That the study examines a hostage negotiation crisis does not take away from its relevance to the current study. Rather both studies contribute to the study of listening as an interactional activity, an activity in which participants are both listeners and speakers.

### 3.2 Cultural discourse analysis

Cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh 2007, 2017; Scollo 2011) provides a productive framework for studying the intersection of language and culture. Building on EC, cultural discourse analysis (hereafter CuDA) attends to the role of language as a way of communicating in cultural scenes. Diversity and variability of how language is used across and within cultural groups is assumed, the description and interpretation of which are goals of this enterprise.

CuDA includes five modes of inquiry: theoretical, descriptive, interpretive, comparative and critical. Studies employing CuDA need not take up all of these modes in a single article or chapter; more common is the use of all five modes in longer, often book-length projects or series of articles and chapters. The current article uses the descriptive and interpretive modes extensively and previews the comparative, critical and the theoretical modes of the larger project.

*Descriptive inquiry* involves meticulous documentation of the communication of interest, “dialogue” in this study, and of the communication practices associated with dialogue. This mode of inquiry makes claims taking the form of “X discourse actually occurred in this social situation this way, or X language was actually used in this situated way” (Carbaugh and Grimshaw, forthcoming). Attention is focused on the terms for talk, such as “dialogue,” patterned communication about and in which dialogue is situated, and the meanings participants treat as relevant in their talk about and in their performance of dialogue. This makes cultural discourse analysis different from approaches prioritizing an



analytical framework independent of participants. Following EC, attention is paid to terms communicators treat as situationally appropriate and relevant; this could include such terms as “political condemnations” among Israelis (Kampf and Katriel 2016) or “diaosi” among Chinese (Witteborn and Haung 2015).

*Communication practices* include acts, events, and styles that are engaged in meaningful ways within specific communication *scenes*, such as public and private; educational, legal, political, and social. We can look to a recent line of studies of a series of public meetings in Omaha, Nebraska (scene) and the *acts* of “raising questions” (Leigher and Black 2010), as well as the *events* of using narratives to activate insider and outsider identities as well as differing views of community values (Black 2009), “saying” and “telling” being used to deal with conflict (Leigher and Castor 2009), and grouping practices revealing how citizens and their Chamber of Commerce experience tensions about how to solve community problems (Witteborn and Sprain 2009) for examples of this way of theorizing language, communication and culture.

Researchers explicate *cultural propositions* staying “very close to the data by placing participants’ terms, in quotes, into statements of belief, and/or value, which captures the meanings that are significant and important to participants” (Carbaugh and Grimshaw, forthcoming). Cultural propositions are thus informed by key cultural terms and use participants’ language to describe and make sense of the communicative behavior. *Cultural premises* are formulations at a higher level of abstractness taking account of participants’ beliefs about what exists and what is valued. To grasp this taken-for-granted knowledge cultural discourse analysts engage in the *interpretive mode of inquiry* that necessarily builds on the descriptive mode. The descriptive materials provide the empirical basis for interpretation. It is at this level the researcher begins the process of explicating cultural propositions and premises to flesh out the explicit and implicit meanings activated in using a term for talk and its associated communication practices. To do so, researchers pay close attention to the semantic features interactants activate in their communication.

CuDA proposes five *discursive hubs* and their *radiant meanings*, empirically derived from studies of speech codes, cultural communication, and cultural discourse theory as sites for interpreting meaningful communication. People activate these discursive hubs as they “presume and create meanings about communication itself, and also about who they are (personhood), about what they are doing (action), about how they are related (relations), about their emotions (feeling), and the nature of things (dwelling)” (Carbaugh 2017, 19). Additional discursive hubs are assumed to exist yet to be discovered.

Cultural discourse analysts treat discursive hubs and radiants of meaning as a singular entity in that community members activate particular hubs and call upon

radiants, such as terms for talking and/or communication practices relevant to the hub, activating deeply felt meanings. Two types of radiants are called upon, explicit and implicit. Each hub includes multiple discursive terms or *grounders*. Interpretation requires studying each grounder and its radiants before addressing the other grounders, and relations among and between these. By so doing, the researcher begins to formulate an understanding of how the term is part of a larger way of communicating as exemplified both within a hub and across hubs. CDW participants treated dialogue as a communication practice that activates what it means to be a person (personhood), how persons are related to other persons (social relations), and what emotions are appropriate (feelings).

Cultural discourse analysis provides a productive methodological approach for understanding how communication is shaped as a cultural practice. More specifically, the approach allows one to understand how communication is conducted, conceived, and evaluated *in situ*. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is it possible to transform a USAmerican cultural scene associated with debate, argument and deliberation into one that facilitates community dialogue?
2. If so, what communication practices and meanings are activated as participants engage in community dialogue?

#### 4. Community dialogue workshop: Cultural scene

The Community Dialogue Project workshop series *War and Peace: A Dialogue* was offered for ten weeks, Sundays 6–8 pm, in a university academic classroom situated on a community college campus. Community members participated for free and students enrolled for 1-credit. The workshop included five self-identified couples who participated in eight of ten sessions. There was at least one new participant each week and four dyads from out of town who read about the workshop in a local paper and participated in one session each. The format for each week's workshop remained consistent with emergent differences as weekly topics changed, co-facilitators changed, and the overall group of participants was never exactly the same. The lead facilitator remained the same throughout the workshop.

The facilitators' goals were to provide: (1) a place for participants to learn about community dialogue, and (2) an opportunity to practice what they were learning by engaging weekly topics related to war and peace in general, and the Iraqi crisis in particular. There were two phases for each workshop. Phase one, the

introduction, consisted of two parts: (a) The workshop facilitator used the first three to five minutes each week to welcome the participants, often interrupting small talk that came to characterize the beginning and ending of each workshop, remind participants of guidelines, respond to participants' questions, and briefly introduce the guest facilitator; and (b) The guest facilitator used the next twenty minutes to introduce the weekly dialogue topic. Phase two consisted of practicing dialogue. Acting as the lead facilitator, I reminded participants of guidelines when violated and oriented my contributions to helping the group both engage in dialogue and to be with others dialogically. In other words, I attempted to facilitate the accomplishment of both community dialogue and recognition of dialogicity as an opening for dialogic moments, implementing the normative and the descriptive approaches. When participants ended the workshop in excitement, hung around talking to the point that the facilitator had, in participants' words to "kick them out and lock the doors," it symbolized that they had successfully "gotten below the sound bite" by engaging in effective dialogue.

## 5. Descriptive analysis

Participants were asked to sign a consent form with four choices for participating in studies of the workshop; twenty nine signed consent forms. As such, in this study I draw from twenty nine participants. Weekly participation averaged twenty eight. Using these participants' direction as to what is important to them, I include workshop six of ten in this study as it "best captures our dialoguing." The data examined in this study include one week's workshop that I transcribed three times over the course of twelve months and once again eleven years later continually revising and correcting, as well as a focus group interview/verbal evaluation, written workshop evaluations and unsolicited participant feedback contained in my field notes.

Analysis included studying dialogue as a *key cultural term* and exploring the communicative practices participants described as essential to dialogue. In this way the use of "dialogue" is treated as a focal communication practice. Using participants' descriptions of "dialogue," including but not limited to "when we were dialoguing" and "when we were not" allows one to hear how this communication practice relates to other communication practices and how these patterned expressions are used situationally. This expressive system of symbolic acts, events, and style puts on display participants' sense of self, relations with others, and communicative practices deemed appropriate for this cultural scene. When participants use acts, events, and styles they are activating a patterned means of expression and their meanings. In these interactions we can see and hear the

means and meanings that members of one USAmerican community created and nurtured as an alternative to the American civil routines that were currently being challenged. The specific methodological moves were: (1) identifying communicative practices participants named and discussed as part of dialogue; (2) exploring uses of these communicative practices within the CDW communication; and (3) analyzing the communication acts, events, and style participants deemed “effective” and “ineffective dialogue.”

### 5.1 Dialogue as event, a sequence of acts

Upon completion of the workshop, participants were asked how they define dialogue. Their responses treated dialogue as an event rather than an act. Dialogue, for these participants, is a sequence of acts, listening then responding. Together these draw our attention to a cultural sphere of discursive activities (Carbaugh 2017). The discursive style for dialogue contrasts with activities like “sharing,” “preaching,” and “arguing” – activities that focus on speaking to present one’s idea and/or to convince another person of one’s viewpoint. The question remains: How do these participants use dialogue as a communicative practice in this community?

First, for CDW participants dialogue is understood as an event involving more than one “other” who can be in their words “classmates,” “family,” “church members,” “co-workers,” “community groups,” and “international figures and our government at large.” Most dialogue events, including our CDW, occur face-to-face, though some CDW participants reported engaging in dialogue online. Establishing “ground rules” for participation enhances opportunity for dialogue to occur because participants are more experienced with debate, argument, and voicing opinion.<sup>1</sup> When dialogue does occur participants “learn more about different people,” have the “potential for better relationships,” find it “helps with con-

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1. Guidelines participants reported as important for effective dialogue included: (1) The instructor facilitates the dialogue. (2) No interrupting. (3) No personal attacks. Don’t demonize those with whom you disagree. (4) No yelling or raising your voice. (5) Remember that nonverbals are part of how we communicate (e.g., rolling your eyes, nodding your head in disagreement, scowling facial expression, reading while other is talking). (6) All communication must be respectful of other participants. Disagree with ideas without attacking, insulting, or name-calling. (7) Remember that nonverbals are part of how we communicate (e.g., rolling your eyes, nodding your head in disagreement, scowling facial expression, reading while other is talking). (8) All communication must be respectful of other participants. Disagree with ideas without attacking, insulting, or name-calling. (9) Keep an open mind with the goal of understanding other’s views. (10) When someone says something you vehemently oppose, apply the above rules of dialogue to your response.

flict resolution” and “open[ing] everyone’s minds to a deeper understanding and appreciation of all involved in solving community issues.” Others “find it useful in everyday life in talking with anyone about anything in order to bring about a better tomorrow.” There are benefits for these participants such as learning about people with whom they would not likely engage due to their differences, enhancing the quality of relationships, and providing ways to hear and understand the complexity and depth of issues thus promoting the variety of voices within the community.

Second, participants describe the style of dialogue as distinct from other ways of communicating. For some participants, dialogue is different from “debate” and “power speak” in which participants “score for finding fault with other’s thesis.” Others describe the style as one in which “I became less strident,” felt myself “being more patient and understanding with others and their views,” found “it easier to focus on ideas instead of the person talking,” started “to listen more and preach less,” and “was more open to new ideas and approaches.” The style is one in “which all participants are valued and respected.” Participants agreed that “the emphasis is on listening rather than on sharing” and communicating in this way makes it easier “to get people to listen to you and not to get turned off by style.”

## 5.2 Listening

For CDW participants the most commonly associated practice is some form of “listening” (mentioned twenty three times), followed by some form of response such as “talking,” “responding to other” and “expressing my point of view” (eleven mentions). Every mention of responding was accompanied by a mention of listening. There were, however, twelve uses of listening with no references to responding. Additional listening radiants included “active,” “understanding,” and “patience.” As participants’ communicate they put on display their use this grounder – listening – and radiants as a discursive hub.

- (1) The skills that I learned in participating in dialogue helped me to learn to listen even more intently to what others are really saying versus what they are not saying and it also taught me to be more patient and understanding to others’ views.

For many participants, listening was named as the most important communication practice in dialoguing as it provides a means to understand what others are communicating from their perspective rather than what a participant expects another participant to be saying. Listening also teaches participants “patience.”

“Active” and “reflective” listening are how participants “understand the other’s point of view.” These types of listening “include asking clarifying questions and

pursuing lines of thought that may be implied.” This way of listening allows for “understanding at a deeper level” and hearing “what others were thinking.” For others, listening situates them such that they “are aware when dialoguing isn’t working.”

CDW participants reported that the style of listening learned and practiced in the CDW workshop was “hard to do well” yet valued as “far more critical in effective communication than articulation of opinion.” Participants spoke of listening “rather than sharing” as the communication practice most important for effective dialogue. When listening, they found themselves “preaching less” and “trying to hear where the other is coming from and why.” Noteworthy is the work being done here to understand, open up to new ideas, and respect the multiplicity of voices in the community.

### 5.3 Verbally responding

Verbally responding is the second act in the sequence CDW participants oriented to when attempting to dialogue. This is their opportunity to “talk,” “speak,” and “express our own point of view.” This act is in relation to the previous act, listening, and thus is treated by participants as “a considered listened response that evolves from other’s ideas and beliefs.” These verbal responses take the form of “responding to what has been said,” “the points raised by others,” and “to the argument.” This type of response is stylistically different from that used in debate and argument, because their goal is not to “win an argument” or “score points,” “just sharing,” and “articulating opinion.” Participants also reported stylistic differences with deliberation in that “we weren’t trying to analyze information and make a decision for our group.” Instead, verbal responses in this scene are part of an event “in which all participants and their ideas are valued.” The goal is to understand each other.

At this point, we can surmise that for these CDW participants, dialogue is a communicative event comprised of a sequence of acts: listening and verbally responding. These acts should be influenced by one another; a verbal response that does not respond to the previous speaker is heard as ineffective in dialogue. One CDW participant captures the event and style when explaining that “dialogue is the meaningful exchange in which participants are able to listen to each other’s point of view and express their own point of view in a manner that ultimately changes, however slightly, both.” The acts of listening and verbally responding include listening to the other’s point of view, and expressing one’s point of view; these acts change both participants. Similarly, another participant stated that “unless we first learn to listen and then thoughtfully move outward in discussion nothing can or will be resolved.”

These data provide evidence of the following cultural propositions these communicators employ when using and making sense of community dialogue. Using their own words, we have evidence of dialogue – listening and verbally responding – as a meaningful communication event. I note the communicative hubs explicitly and implicitly activated when CDW participants accomplish effective community dialogue in brackets.

- Dialogue occurs with “others” [social relations] and differs from “debate” and “powerspeak” [communication action].
- Dialogue requires “listening” [communication action] and “a considered listened response that evolves from other’s ideas and beliefs” [social relations].
- Listening is how participants “understand the other’s point of view” [social relations], “at a deeper level,” allowing one to grasp “what others are really saying versus what they are not saying” [communication action], and is “hard to do well” [feelings].
- Responding with a “considered response” [social relations] is how participants “express our own point of view” and “respond to what has been said” [communication action] without “preaching” [communication action], “just sharing [communication action],” and “articulating opinion” [communication action].
- Dialogue is a “meaningful exchange in which participants are able to listen to each other’s point of view and express their own point of view in a manner that ultimately changes, however slightly, both,” can “open everyone’s minds to a deeper understanding,” and be used to “resolve conflict” and “bring about a better tomorrow” [communication action].
- Dialogue participants are listeners and speakers, interdependent as they become “more patient and understanding with others and their views,” can be “classmates,” “family,” “church members,” “co-workers,” “community groups,” and international figures and our government at large” [social relations].

The hubs of communicative action and social relations, and their discursive spheres account for this deeply felt and understood communicative practice, CDW community dialogue.

These cultural propositions articulated in the language of CDW participants demonstrate some of the taken-for-granted knowledge necessary to use this language in community dialogue. To further interpret this way of dialoguing, I follow the EC and CuDA tradition of integrating relevant theoretical grounding to further make sense of how participants understand a communication practice. I rely on the notions of *positioning* and *dialectical tensions* to formulate cultural premises (i.e., assumptions regarding what exists and what is valued) when CDW participants accomplished what they referred to as “effective dialogue.”

## 6. What exists and what is valued

Communication scenes support and inhibit individual and community identities in various ways. Some allow for only one or the other and different scenes allow for both. At play is the in-the-moment display of social relations and their implied senses of personhood. CDW participants avowed communal identities such as mothers, wives of Vietnam veterans, veterans, and students in similar (community) and different (individual) ways. How participants make sense of these identities is dependent on their understanding of their shared cultural identity as USAmericans.

Carbaugh (1996) provides a framework for discovering, describing and interpreting this *positioning* of identification. Communicators are assumed to be *agents-in-scenes* and researchers can “unveil the social kinds and cultural codes of being interactively expressed and related” (142) in their cultural scenes. Positioning occurs when communicators avow specific identities and social relations implicating related senses of personhood. Carbaugh calls this interactional move *explication* and I demonstrate below it is not limited to these discursive hubs. Some explications are *elaborated* as communicators *socially ratify* an explication; other explications are *socially rejected* and still others are *socially negotiated*.

In Example (2) the CDW interaction is forty-six minutes into the workshop. Eleven participants have spoken when Bob<sup>2</sup> spoke after listening for twelve and a half minutes and asked a question. This question does not function as a call for a response. Instead, it ratifies previous topics (“with all these givens”) followed by a question functioning as a question for the group (“why then are these people...?”). That this question was elaborated and socially negotiated by more than one participant, including a participant speaking for the first time other than introductions, is one sort of evidence of a *dialogic moment*. “The conceptualization of dialogic moments recognizes that although extended periods of full mutuality are unlikely in situations where status inequalities are very clear, the potential still exists for moments of mutuality” (Black 2008, 99). Linda’s response in this sequence further demonstrates the interactional accomplishments CDW participants cited as examples of effective dialogue.

- (2) **Bob:** So I have a question here with all these givens lack of government support for burdens vets carry when they return and it being worth protesting why then are people who protest for peace castigated for not supporting the troops if these are the very people who are of this insight....

**Frank:** ...yeah...

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2. The names of participants have been changed in all examples to protect their anonymity.



**Ps:** (undistinguishable group of individuals overlapping with Frank) YES YEAH

**Bob:** ...that you are saying is in the minority...

**Frank:** ...exactly...

**Bob:** ...I don't get that

**Linda:** I would like to share my thing my feelings [husband's first name] was in Vietnam I was on the home front and had two children and four and and...five of us here in Riverton actually because I'm originally from Riverton and um I was HASSLED by every human being about why you're why is your husband in the war and why why is he doing this why were you doing this well I didn't BELIEVE the war I I didn't believe in the war BUT this was his profession and uhhh what are you going to say well it's his profession well why is it his profession and I carry RESENTMENT that you can't believe for not supporting those men and I cry [voice gets shaky] right now when I see how the American people at THIS point have SUPPORTED those soldiers is JUST ABSOLUTELY wonderful and I I praise the Americans for doing that but we DID NOT get that and I was on the home front getting those tapes hearing those bombs in the uh you know he was sending me tapes and the bombs in the back you worry about your husband you've got two children to raise everybody against you for your husband being in war is not nice and SHAME SHAME SHAME on America.

Bob elaborates over three turns at talk, between which participants offer support to continue the elaboration with “yeah”s, “YES,” and “exactly” that he treats as ratifications. The tone at this point is one of excitement as participants activate feelings as a discursive hub related to community dialogue.

Linda has spoken only once since the beginning of the workshop, during introductions. When she spoke she explicitly avowed identities and social relations that had not yet been included in the interaction. She elaborates using a personal narrative as the wife of a soldier, a wife who does not agree with the war yet is treated negatively for supporting her husband's “profession.” Linda expanded the identity of persons “against the war” noting that some family members of military personnel share this identity. Second, she used emotional expression to localize the topic by contrasting then and now: “I carry RESENTMENT that you can't believe for not supporting those men and I cry [voice gets shaky] right now when I see how the American people at THIS point have SUPPORTED those soldiers is JUST ABSOLUTELY wonderful”. Third she validated the identity of Americans who have supported soldiers: “I praise the Americans for doing that.” And Linda offered a new topic for social negotiation: “SHAME SHAME SHAME ON America” for ‘hassling’ soldiers and their families,” a theme that expresses how

veterans and their family should feel about those rejecting veterans returning from war.

CDW participants reported this interaction to be an example of effective dialogue. Bob and Linda's comments mark the beginning and ending of a brief yet meaningful dialogue. Bob has shared personal narratives prior to Example (2) and Linda responds with a personal, highly emotional response emphasizing the tensions she felt, pulled in competing directions (against the war/husband's profession is military, absence of support for returning Vietnam veterans/more recent support for returning veterans). Noteworthy are the use of personal narratives and that Linda did not attempt to resolve these tensions. Similar to how individuals used storytelling to deliberate responses to the bombing of the World Trade Centers (Black 2008), CDW participants' storytelling helped "cocreate and manifest their identities in relation to one another and also enable[d] them to imagine and appreciate each other's perspectives" (95–96). This positioning of self and others enables dialogic moments as participants socially negotiate the tensions activated in terms of personhood, topic, and structure of CDW dialogues.

Attempts to resolve tensions, within their own as well as within other's interaction led to ineffective dialogue. When dialogue was ineffective, as noted by participants, the response did not elaborate and was not taken up by subsequent participants as appropriate for social negotiation. This occurred as participants began to argue and debate, setting forth opinions uninformed by the ongoing interaction. This style is combative, features dichotomous thinking, contains opinions and personal viewpoints, and is highly impersonal toward other and of self.

(3) **Jason:** Was the Vietnam War even winnable...

**Rick:** ...Yes it was

**Facilitator:** Listening to Linda I'm reminded of when my dad was called to Oxford, MS as a member of the National Guard to protect James Meredith uh who tried to enter Ole Miss as the first black student and how conflicted my dad was and how shocked he was that 'white locals shot up in our Guard camps.' Isn't it interesting how my dad's experiences are similar to Linda's?

**Class:** It is...           ... Oh wow yes...           ... now that you mention it...           ... clapping...

**Paul:** I would like to say because I did protest the Vietnam War and I I never felt comfortable with it because of exactly the position that you're expressing Linda. I was philosophically against the war and my friends were going over there and I knew people took my protesting as a sign I didn't support the soldiers.

**Daniel:** I know it was hard on all of my family while I was there, my wife and kids and parents

**Michelle:** I have heard so many of my friends describe similar experiences of being against war yet having family and friends there, some not there by choice.

**Ian:** And what about how terribly people are treated when they are just doing their job when they don't even agree with their job.

**Rick:** It was a winnable war.

**Reggie:** Come on history has shown that isn't true...

**Philip:** ...yes it is...

**Reggie:** Did you read McNamara's biography...

**Mark:** ...He just wanted to make money and clear his name.

In this example Jason entered a dialogic moment with an impersonal question unrelated to the current interaction and Rick immediately responds taking up this new and unrelated topic. Sensing a shift in style, as facilitator I redirected the interaction to Linda's comments using a personal narrative. Participants clapped and socially ratified this move followed by a return the dialogic moment that ended when four participants took up an argument by offering impersonal "facts" without elaboration and focused on rejecting each other's points.

So why are participants unable to maintain dialogue over a sustained period of time? I turn to *dialectical tensions* as an interpretive device to further flesh out how this way of communicating is part of a larger domain of communication practices for engaging differences within this USAmerican community. Dialectical tensions are to be expected in communication, and these tensions create opportunities within relationships (Baxter and Braithwaite 2010; Baxter and Montgomery 1996). That dialogue is momentary, fleeting, and difficult to sustain, can be explained by exploring the dialectical tensions participants call attention to in their effort to engage in dialogue.

One tension is between speaking and listening, starting with one participant's comment when asked about dialogue: "I was not expecting the emphasis on listening although I was there to hear what others were thinking." That this participant "was not expecting the emphasis on listening" indicates their assumption that another communication practice is the recognized means for "hear[ing] what others are thinking." It is in this communication and fellow participants' that we can hear more about what they expected: "to express my own point of view," "that we would be expressing our points of view speaking," and "responding to the argument." These ways of communicating reflect the curricula in USAmerican high schools, colleges and universities, where stu-

dents study public speaking and argumentation, and participate on competitive debate teams. These ways also implicate the form of speaking Carbaugh and others have convincingly described and interpreted as civic routine for public discourse. As such, I postulate that these participants, while treating dialogue as an event, experienced a dialectical tension between what they expected – to argue, to debate – and what functions as CDP dialogue – listening as a means for “hear[ing] what others think.”

Another CDW participant stated that dialogue “differs in that the emphasis is on listening and understanding rather than on the sharing.” This participant activates another layer of meaning: that understanding is accomplished through listening. Here again, a participant confronts the dialectic between what is culturally appropriate communication. This individual did not expect the emphasis on “listening” nor “understanding” as part of community dialogue. Instead, they expected that “sharing” would be the communicative practice key to community dialogue. The individual’s expectations have changed from sharing to understanding and listening as a communicative practice that situates one in being with others in a way to achieve this understanding. Sharing is not the practice that activates attention to understanding. Listening makes it “easier to focus on ideas not the individual” and “broadens, relaxes and opens one to an attitude that is not fixed but is rather capable of understanding and embracing others’ ideas.” Further, listening to others activates others’ listening as they “don’t get turned off by style, argumentative type.” As this participant explains, listening is a strategic communicative practice, an action that participants respond to less defensively than when being “preached to” and “argued with.”

Dialogue as a way of communicating with community members “who strongly differ in opinion from you” was valued by CDW participants as evidenced in their communication and their continued attendance across the 10-week workshop. More specifically, participants spoke of CDW dialogue as a practice that is a “meaningful exchange” in which “all participants are valued and respected.” Others described the practice as “far more critical in effective communication than articulation of opinion.” Still others emphasized the “patience” learned through practicing dialogue that then “enhances learning.” This learning was possible as “we became less aggressive at promoting a pre-conceived notion allowing it to evolve out of group interests rather than self-promotion.”

In addition to these explicit messages about listening and sharing are those implicated in these descriptions. That one is concerned with, interested in others, suggests an orientation toward relationship rather than a preoccupation with the self and in turn, implicates a way of being that is located in interpersonal and communal relations that differs from the more common American ways of speaking about public concerns – argument and debate. These hubs of meaning are not

specific to a participant; instead, they are meaningful across participants and formulated here in the form of cultural premises of what participants know to exist and what they value.

What exists:

- Community dialogue is one of a set of communication practices that some USAmericans use to engage differences [communication action].
- USAmericans are more educated and trained in debate, argument and deliberation than community dialogue [social relations to institutions].

What is valued:

- Community dialogue using guidelines allows some USAmericans to practice dialogue as a means for understanding, learning, and building patience [communication action].
- Effective community dialogue allows participants to prioritize relations with others without disregarding self [social relations].

## 7. Community dialogue: The possibilities for current times

Many USAmerican communities are today experiencing tremendous political polarization, the highest rates of hate crime incidents in years, and breakdowns across community and interpersonal relationships. Debate and argument are failing to produce understanding and relational turbulence continues to be part of our daily interactions. Analysis and interpretation of the CDW make the case that members of this specific community were able to transform a cultural scene once privileging debate, argument, and deliberation to one embracing community dialogue as a means of engaging a highly contested community issue, the 2003 USA invasion of Iraq. CDW participants reported that workshops created a place and space where different, often competing ideas, were explored supporting Baraldi and Farini's (2011) conceptualization of dialogue. Listening and verbally responding are essential communication acts CDW participants employed in the community dialogue event. When effective, listening and verbally responding were interdependent, influenced by one another, and elaborated senses of personhood, social relations, feelings, and communication outcomes through interaction. Further analyses of the particulars of this social negotiation process are currently in process.

CDP workshops support Pearce and Pearce's (2004) findings that listening is a powerful opening for dialogue (55). Participants in this study cited listening as an important communicative practice in creating understandings that allow

them to hold their own and simultaneously be changed by others. Listening also allowed participants to recognize dialogic openings, build new ideas with others, and sustain moments of dialogue. That noted, it is important to consider that refraining from speaking does not mean one is listening (Agne 2018) as evidenced by participants in Example (3). These participants had spent considerably more time listening than talking yet some activated argument and debate (Jason, Rick, Reggie, Philip and Mark) instead of elaborating and negotiating the social relations and topics activated in that moment as did Paul, Daniel, Michelle and Ian who extended the dialogic moment.

Finally, CDW suggests, as does Black's (2005) analysis of an organizational workshop and Jovanovic and Wood's (2006) study of one city's process of establishing an ethics initiative, that if we intentionally create places where persons who disagree, misunderstand one another, and have differences of opinions are encouraged to interact by listening and then verbally responding to what is heard, dialogic moments may occur. These community members can invoke a particular communication event transforming the place into a cultural scene amplifying a view of person as relational as opposed to an individual independent of others as set forth by in the once predictable practices for engaging dissent publicly, namely debate and argument. As whom we are is partially how we interact, changing the way we communicate can change the way we be with others. Further, recognizing when we are relating with other dialogically provides individuals with an opportunity to engage the dialogic moment.

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## Address for correspondence

Natalie J. Dollar  
Oregon State University-Cascades  
1500 SW Chandler Avenue  
Bend, Oregon 97702  
USA  
ndollar@osucascades.edu

## Biographical notes

**Natalie J. Dollar**, Associate Professor of Speech Communication, teaches courses in intercultural and interpersonal communication, community dialogue, communication theory, and youth communication outreach. Natalie's scholarship focuses on identity, culture, and community dialogue. She has published articles and book chapters on "houseless" and street-oriented youth, members of a musical speech community, and ethnographic approaches for studying group – cultural and intercultural – interaction.

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