

DIALOGUE AND DIFFERENCE: FACILITATING DIFFICULT DIALOGUES IN
THE ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband and best friend Mark. Thank you for always being there for me and for consistently providing me with the love and unwavering support which have made this dissertation possible. You have been so wonderful throughout this long and often stressful process. I cannot thank you enough for your encouragement, wisdom, friendship, and support, particularly during my final months of writing where you provided countless of hours of daddy daycare for our beautiful and precious son, Austin. I am truly grateful to have you both in my life.

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ABSTRACT

The topic of dialogue, especially as it pertains to interpersonal communication and conflict resolution, is an important issue as we continue to see increasing human conflicts occurring at all levels of society. As globalization continues to create greater complexity and increased global tensions, educators are increasingly being called upon to consider what role education might play in preparing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to more successfully work with others, across difference, in an increasingly diverse and ever changing social environment. Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to discover how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference as well as identify the factors that contribute to effective engagement in the dialogue process. It was hoped that through this research, patterns would be identified that can have broader applicability, particularly when working with adults in situations where conflicting perspectives exist and will contribute further to the thought, practice, and facilitation of dialogue within the field of adult education. Findings from the study indicated that dialogue facilitators establish important conditions in order to facilitate effective and constructive dialogues in the learning environment. As a result, a framework began to emerge illustrating three key conditions necessary for effective dialogue facilitation as derived from the research data: increasing participant understanding of dialogue process, establishing a conducive environment for dialogue to occur, and utilizing fundamental facilitator skills.

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Institutions of learning, like society, are becoming increasingly diverse and this diversity can sometimes generate interpersonal conflict situations as people from different backgrounds, cultures, ages, etc. possess unique perspectives which can contribute significantly to increased tensions, misunderstandings, and ultimately conflict. In fact, many educators across disciplines and learning institutions will inevitably encounter situations where discussions become confrontational or “heated” due to differing perspectives concerning various conflict laden topics and issues. Fortunately, dialogue as described in this research, has proven to be “a useful process for talking about tension-filled topics” (Schirch & Campt, 2007, p. 5) and can assist educators in constructively responding to and facilitating difficult or heated conversations which might arise while covering difficult or emotion-laden topics in the learning environment.

Given the increasingly diverse composition of most adult classrooms and training settings, differences in perspectives and experiences among learners are common and the tensions that may emerge can arise in the most unexpected ways. One such example was provided to me a few years ago when I was interviewing a conflict resolution educator who told me about an experience in the classroom where two students held very different perspectives which stimulated an in class discussion fraught with a great deal of emotion. In this experience one of the students, a female from Iraq, became very angry with an active duty United States Army officer who had recently returned from a military deployment in Iraq. The Iraqi student was angry at the male military student for being part of the U.S. Army and for the American presence in her country. She shared her perspective about human atrocities that have occurred in Iraq and criticized the Army

officer for his profession; a man who from her point of view served as a reminder of the pain of her lived experience as an Iraqi growing up in the midst of war. For many educators, this kind of explosive and emotionally charged conflict instills dread and tends to cause the educator, and sometimes others in the learning environment, to want to default towards a natural human tendency of avoiding conflict. But is conflict avoidance the best solution? Could such a conflict be turned into a transformational learning experience for the learners? And if so, how does an educator facilitate constructive dialogue across such divides which might provide a transformational learning experience for the learners?

For educators, learning how to constructively facilitate dialogues over difficult topics can alleviate many of their fears, thereby, lessening the desire to avoid topics that might provide important moments of enriched learning through the sharing of differing perspectives. Additionally, facilitating a space for learners to engage in and practice respectful dialogue across differences can assist them in developing valuable interpersonal competencies they will need to successfully interact in an increasingly diverse, social environment. Consequently, through this research, I have endeavored to learn more about how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding constructively engage individuals in the process of dialogue across difference in order to consider approaches in teaching that may better equip educators with a greater understanding of the nature and process of dialogue and its facilitation in the learning environment.

Statement of the Problem

Interpersonal conflicts are found throughout human relationships, at all levels of

society, and are an inevitable human experience which can be constructive or destructive, depending on how conflicts are addressed. Unfortunately, educational systems and learning approaches often focus on technical skill development and fail to address interpersonal skill development that might equip learners with the skills necessary to constructively manage conflict they may encounter in the workplace, at home, and/or within society at large. Increasingly, it is becoming apparent that there exists a great need for people to learn how to effectively and constructively exchange ideas openly among those with differing views so that individuals are better “able to work together and communicate in nonviolent, productive ways to resolve the everyday conflicts that occur in their lives” (Blakeway, 2011, p.1).

Strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to constructively dialogue across difference, are increasingly being identified as important attributes for success both personally and professionally. Often, differing perspectives and an inability to effectively dialogue across those differences contribute to interpersonal conflict. The ability to communicate through effective dialogue has a direct relationship with how successful individuals are when interacting with others and plays a large role in mitigating and even avoiding the difficulties and pitfalls often associated with conflict. Moreover, as communities around the world “continue to be prone to conflict and violence” (Smith, 2013, p.3) the practice of dialogue is rapidly becoming an area of growing interest as there appears to be an increasing awareness that there exists a genuine need for individuals to learn to effectively communicate with others in order to successfully mitigate the destructiveness that conflict can create. Smith (2013) notes that “education is playing an increasingly important role in promoting world views, teaching

personal and professional skills, and supporting local capacities that foster stability and build peace” (p.3) and that educators are increasingly becoming an important part of engaging in and assisting others with learning the skills and techniques necessary to constructively manage conflict, including the ability to navigate difficult dialogues across difference. However, more research is needed on how facilitators of dialogue prepare and engage participants to dialogue constructively with others across difference so individuals are better prepared to work collaboratively, across divides, to overcome differences that threaten desirable and constructive outcomes throughout a broad range of human activities.

Significance of the Study

Diversity and difference within the adult learning environment, as well as the incorporation of diversity related content challenges adult educators to consider approaches in teaching (Murray-Johnson, 2015), that may better equip learners with the interpersonal competencies they will need to successfully interact in an increasingly diverse social environment. The adult educational landscape is wonderfully diverse and has the potential to provide rich opportunities for learners to cultivate improved awareness and understanding of themselves, others, their needs, and perspectives through the understanding and practice of the dialogue process. Kasl and Yorks (2016) highlight that “facilitating learning across personal and social divides has always been a significant facet of adult education practice, one that is becoming more critical in the intensifying complexity of globalization and societal upheavals” (p.3). As such, it is important that adult educators begin to consider how they might engage and assist others with learning the cognitive and emotional capacities as well as strategies necessary to constructively

engage in dialogue, particularly for difficult dialogues across difference, so that learners are empowered to collaborate with others and arrive at deeper understandings.

As we prepare for an increasingly complex social environment that brings with it ever growing social tensions, the development of capacities to engage in dialogue, certainly offers a new, and often ignored, approach in encouraging adults to become better equipped both intellectually and socially to interact with others in order to produce creative solutions to new and emerging issues. Dialogue is a good communication tool that allows for meaningful interactions between people, particularly among people from different backgrounds, to exchange ideas by encouraging participants to listen to understand other viewpoints without trying to argue or oppose differing ideas. Dialogue has the potential to foster understanding among interlocutors and provides a space for questioning social constructions and assumptions that shape negative assumptions, stereotypes and misperceptions, thereby, reducing misunderstandings and tensions that can contribute to conflict situations among individuals and groups. The incorporation of dialogue within the learning environment may prove to be valuable for adult learners in a myriad of settings because it offers insights and skills on increasing greater understanding and appreciation and respect for others within our globally connected environment and offers an opportunity to incorporate more holistic methods of learning that can foster improved personal awareness as well as greater openness to other perspectives and human understanding.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding

constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference. This study sought to identify the factors that contribute to effective engagement in the dialogue process, as well as demonstrate dialogue's potential to assist interlocutors in questioning constructions that may lend themselves to transformational perspectives. It was hoped that through this research, patterns would be identified that might have broader applicability, particularly when working with adults in situations where conflicting perspectives exist. Consequently, I developed my initial research questions with a focus on ascertaining the primary research question for this study: *How do educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference?* Specifically, I asked (1) *What factors do experienced conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding educators perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process?* (2) *How do these educators while involved within a dialogue pertaining to conflictual content and diverse perspectives manage emotions, their own and those of others, when they emerge?* and (3) *What, if any, indications are there that the process of engaging in difficult dialogues across points of difference contribute to transformed perspectives?*

Definition of Terms

There are several terms that are discussed in this study which may be unfamiliar to the reader or may be used differently within the literature. As such, important terms which are germane to this study are defined for the reader in order to clarify how these terms are used throughout this study.

1. Conflict: "A struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals." (Pia & Diez, 2007, p.2)
2. Interpersonal conflict: A situation where "people have incompatible needs, goals, or approaches in their relationship" (Fisher, 2000, p. 3) which frequently leads to

“antagonistic feelings toward each other” (p. 1).

3. Conflict resolution: “Any process used to manage, determine, or settle differences that may arise among individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, nations, or any other social unit.” (Barsky, 2009)
4. Educator: “a person who provides instruction or education” (Oxford, 2017); one who facilitates the learning of others as well as the learning of teams and organizations across a variety of contexts.
5. Interpersonal skills: Skills pertaining to communicating and interacting with other people.
6. Communication: “To convey information or knowledge from one person to another”. (Bohm, 1996, p.2)
7. Dialogue: “A process of direct, face-to-face encounter” (Bohm, 1996, p. xi) “among any number of people, not just two” (p. 6) whereby human beings genuinely listen to each other (Saunders, 2011) in a conversation “seeking mutual understanding” (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 14).
8. Difficult Dialogue: Dialogues that address controversial topics and/or potentially divisive issues (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 1999). For this study, the terms *difficult dialogue* and *difficult discourse* are used interchangeably.
9. Dialogue across Difference: A communication process engaged in among diverse people possessing differing perspectives (Gurin, Nagda, Zuniga, 2013) that is often facilitated in order to promote understanding of the other.
10. Transformational Learning: The “process of effecting change in a *frame of reference*” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5); “Dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p.130)

Researcher Influences and Assumptions

I began my academic career as a student of political science, focusing much of my attention on large scale, macro-level political and international conflicts; however, over the past several years I have become increasingly interested in learning more about micro-level, interpersonal conflicts which exist within society, the workplace, and among individuals as they are often the basis for larger societal conflicts. As both a former

military child and current military spouse, I have had the unique opportunity to live, work, and travel around the world and witness, first hand, various types of conflicts stemming from differences in perspectives regarding many important social issues. I have witnessed conflict in so many areas of society and among so many different groups of people I have often felt as though the vast majority of people, and the media, are more predisposed to fueling the flames of conflict, discrimination, and anger rather than promoting understanding and/or seeking to discover solutions to conflict.

Over the course of my life, I have grown in the awareness that although interpersonal conflict is a common human occurrence often stemming from differing needs, values, beliefs, and perspectives, few people receive formal training on how to constructively respond to or discuss conflictual topics when they inevitably arise. In fact, programs designed to train educators tend to focus on the technical aspects of teaching and learning rather than on preparing educators on the social aspect of learning and the need to actively engage and involve learners with meaningful learning derived from open dialogue with others and the co-construction of knowledge. My experiences and observations have, therefore, instilled in me a personal need to try and understand interpersonal conflict more deeply and discover ways in which educators might better equip people with the skills necessary to interact more effectively with others so that they are better prepared to work towards non-violent solutions to deeply divisive issues in the hopes of lessening the amount of violent conflicts that seem all too prevalent within society today. In a global society where diversity and difference are ever present, I believe it is important that learners are provided the opportunity to learn how to constructively dialogue with others across difference in the hopes of fostering within

people a desire and skill to peacefully “discover solutions to problems that seem unsolvable” (Wheatley, 2009, p. 59).

Guided by the supposition that "society is not a cohesive unit, but is ‘constituted of multiple, overlapping and intersecting networks of power’” (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2005 p. 190) and that there exists intersecting relationships and an interconnected “wholeness” of our human existence, especially as they pertain to the larger social and political systems, I approached this research with the assumption that there exists a need for adult educators to assist others in learning how to effectively communicate and work with other people from different backgrounds and perspectives in order to bring about increased cooperation and facilitate positive change which is becoming increasingly important in the world today. As I believe there is a great need to learn and practice the respectful, open exchange of ideas among those with differing views, I believe the learning environment presents wonderful opportunities for people of different backgrounds to practice effective, pro-social, interpersonal communication. The major assumption guiding this research was that dialogue, a particular type of communication, is an important skill to learn and practice because it allows for the respectful exchange of ideas and encourages greater understanding of other viewpoints, thereby, reducing misunderstandings and tensions that can create destructive conflict situations. Additionally, I was guided by the assumption that dialogue has the ability to be transformational in that it can deepen awareness and understanding of differing perspectives and provides interlocutors with the opportunity to reevaluate previous assumptions and positions.

Research and Theoretical Perspective

As a researcher, I employ an interpretivist paradigm which seeks to understand how constructions are created by exploring “human ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts or in terms of the wider culture” in order to understand more deeply the ways in which “reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). In addition to the interpretivist paradigm, my epistemological perspective has been considerably influenced by constructionism, which according to Crotty (1998) asserts that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). In essence, it is a perspective which asserts “individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22) and that reality is a socially constructed process created and reproduced through human activity (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Jacob, 1987; Lindlof, 1995; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Walton, 2010).

Constructionist standpoint theories assert that “people coming from different backgrounds typically have different basic assumptions and opinions” (Bohm, 1996, p. 11) and may perceive the same event(s) in different ways due to different cultural contexts so viewing this research from the standpoint of constructionism allows for the investigation of assumptions born from human experience and culture, as well as, individual “perceptions of the world” (p. xiii). My decision to view this research through the lens of constructionism stemmed from my interest in understanding how conflict resolution educators prepare adults to engage in dialogues across difference which ultimately may challenge adult learners’ current constructions about their understandings

and interactions in the world and with others, including existing assumptions, beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Recognizing that social groups construct their own realities (Patton, 2002) and that society is based on arriving at shared meanings which ultimately holds society together (Bohm, 1996), dialogue serves as a vital communication tool that enables people to engage in the exchange of ideas and is a process whereby “subconscious belief systems and unexamined frames of reference are made conscious and critically evaluated by the intellect in the public forum” (Cunningham, 2014, p. 4). Additionally, because there is a great deal of literature which suggests that “group experiences can foster substantive adult learning and transformative development when participants’ assumptions, perspectives, and meaning structures are challenged through critical reflection and dialogical communication” (Walton, 2010; Bohm, 1996; Freire, 1972; Isaacs, 1999; Mezirow, 1994, 1997), the theories I have explored within this research lay within the intersectionality of dialogue and transformational learning theory. By viewing this research through the lens Jack Mezirow’s (1991) transformational learning theory, I hoped to ascertain a greater understanding of “how adults make meaning of their life experiences and how this meaning-making can bring about powerful changes or transformations in their view of themselves and their world” (Merriam, 2006, p. 25). Engaging in the dialogue process with others allows space for the questioning of social constructions and allows for increased awareness and critical reflection regarding our own ideas and assumptions that shape how we think about the social world. In addition, examining the dialogue process across dimensions of difference through the lens of constructionism allowed for the exploration of how people come to understand and

potentially experience transformational learning experiences, whereby, through the process of dialogue, moments of transformational learning can occur.

Research Design

“All case study research starts from the same compelling feature: the desire to derive a(n) (up-)close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or small number of “cases,” set in their real-world contexts (Yin, 2012, p. 3). Accordingly, I chose to conduct a qualitative multiple case study consisting of a small number of educators from the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding who each represented a unit of analysis in this study. The selection of these types of educators as the pool of participants for this study was based on the assumption that they have extensive knowledge of conflict theories and methods for conflict resolution and this study’s interest in discovering how educators possessing this type of knowledge facilitate difficult dialogues among adults across a broad range of conflictual topics. As such, the proposed study examined how educators from the afore mentioned fields prepare people to constructively engage in dialogues across difference as well as demonstrate dialogue’s potential to assist interlocutors in questioning constructions that may lend themselves to transformational perspectives.

For this study, I examined educator perspectives regarding dialogue by interviewing them about their experiences and perceptions regarding how they prepare adults to constructively engage in dialogues across difference and asked them how facilitating the dialogue process has contributed to their own learning. By employing case study as my approach, I aimed to focus on obtaining an in-depth understanding of selected “cases” in order to identify what these educators believe to be the most important

things they have learned from their experiences engaging in the dialogue process. As noted by Robert Yin (1994), the case study is “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 13) and was, therefore, the appropriate selection for me as I set out to understand and describe how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding prepare people to constructively engage in dialogue across difference.

Overview of Methods

This study followed the qualitative research approach to case study and included seven participants purposefully selected from various conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding programs across the Washington D.C. metro area who educate and engage adults in and through the practice of dialogue across differences of age, gender, race, culture, political orientation, and other conflictual, difficult, and/or emotion-laden topics. The primary methods for collecting data for this study included participant interviews with audio transcription, critical incident reflections, and document collection. The collected data was inductively analyzed and interpretations of connections between categories and themes that emerged were used to further understandings of how these types of educators prepare people to constructively engage in dialogue across difference. Additionally, data were analyzed in order to identify dialogue’s potential, if any, to assist interlocutors with questioning social constructions that may lend themselves to transformational perspectives. Through this research I hoped to gain greater insights regarding dialogue and its value in the learning process in order to ultimately identify patterns that can have broader applicability, particularly when working with adults in situations where conflicting perspectives exist.

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Dissertation

“Human beings are born into relationships and live their lives in relationships” (Saunders, 2001, p. 37); however, most do not receive formal education on how to constructively respond to or communicate across differences that will inevitably arise from human interaction and relationships, particularly within a more globally connected and socially diverse environment. As educators, it is important to prepare people to be both cognitively and socially prepared to successfully engage with others in the workplace and within society at large. As a result, the goal of this research was focused on identifying how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding prepare people to constructively engage in dialogue across difference so learners are better equipped to manage conflicts in their lives which often stem from differences in perspectives. Additionally, through this research, I hoped to demonstrate dialogue’s potential to assist in transformational learning experiences for those engaged in the dialogue process across dimensions of difference.

In Chapter II, I provide a literature review subdivided into seven main sections: (1) why dialogue matters, (2) significance of dialogue in understanding conflict, (3) the nature of dialogue (4) dialogic education, (5) collaborative learning and dialogue, (6) transformational learning theory, and finally (7) emotions in the dialogue process. Each section contributes to understanding more fully the nature of dialogue and how through understanding and practicing effective dialogue across difference, “multiple, contradictory but equally valid accounts of the world” (Gray, 2013, p. 20) can be constructively addressed in the classroom which can potentially contribute to the transformational learning experiences for adults by way of perspective transformation. In

Chapter III, I discuss in more detail the qualitative method of case study research and outline how I conducted my research. I also describe how I engaged in thematic analysis to identify core categories which emerged in order to more fully understand approaches for facilitating dialogues across difference that might positively contribute to the field of adult education. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study with a view to providing rich narratives from each participant. Finally, in Chapter V, a discussion of the key findings of the research as well as conclusions and recommendations for both practice and further research are presented along with a final researcher reflection as my conclusion.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The topic of dialogue is an important issue as we continue to see mounting human conflicts occurring at all levels of human relationships and increasingly played out in real time in the media and on the internet. It is a topic which increasingly calls upon educators to consider what role education can and should play in preparing learners to compassionately engage with others through the practice of dialogue in order to cultivate persons “who can understand that the future of their world depends on global cooperation and peace and that the first step to global peace is learning how to resolve conflicts here at home” (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005, p. 98). Educators are often called upon to manage difficult discourses which may arise in diverse learning environments; however, facilitating difficult dialogues is often a daunting and difficult endeavor for many educators with few published studies focused exclusively on instructor experiences facilitating difficult dialogues. Gaining such an understanding is important in helping educators recognize that difficult dialogues do not need to be avoided, but instead offer important opportunities for increased learning. Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of existing literature pertaining to the nature of conflict, the practice of dialogue, and its significance in the learning process. It is my hope thorough this research to focus more attention on the academic study, practice and facilitation of dialogue within the field of adult education and adult educator development programs in order to learn more about how adult educators might facilitate meaningful dialogues in the classroom so that learners come to understand the nature of dialogue and the pro social skills necessary to constructively engage in dialogues across difference so that they are better prepared to manage interpersonal conflict in an increasingly, diverse, turbulent

and interdependent world (Carlsson-Paige & Lantieri, 2005).

Research for this paper began by exploring literature from both the fields of conflict resolution and adult education and related in one way or another to the topics of interpersonal conflict, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, dialogue, and transformational learning. The literature collected for this research was primarily accessed using Texas State's Alkek Library Online Resources and utilized various research databases including Ebsco, ProQuest, and ERIC. Literature was also collected from George Mason University's School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution Library. As this has been an exploratory endeavor, a variety of search terms combinations were used including: adult education, adult learning, conflict, conflict resolution, interpersonal conflict, dialogue, collaborative learning, and transformational learning.

Why Dialogue Matters

"Education is a constantly changing human practice" due largely to "changes in social understandings" (Smeyers & Burbules, 2006, p.363) regarding the needs of students to interact within their societies. Sleight & Ritzer (2004) note that education "is more than the transmission of facts – it is about helping individuals maximize their potential, both personally and professionally" (p.1) and should prepare students for active and effective participation within society (Barker, 2000). Accordingly, skills such as dialogue and effective communication are becoming increasingly important as people progressively find that they are living and working with others from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives and must demonstrate that they are not only technically skilled to perform their work, but socially skilled as well. Therefore, "a critical task for educators is preparing students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes" needed to

communicate effectively across differences of race, ethnicity, age, gender, culture, and religion, political orientation, and in different contextual situations in order to prepare learners for “active and responsible participation within a rapidly changing, sociocultural milieu” (Walton, 2010, p. 157).

Strong interpersonal skills including the ability to constructively dialogue across difference are increasingly being identified as important attributes for success both personally and professionally so that people are better prepared to interact in an increasingly complex social environment. The ability to communicate through effective dialogue has a direct relationship with how successful individuals will be when interacting with others and can play a large role in transforming conflictual situations into constructive occurrences that may well resolve conflict. Fisher (2000) notes that “communication breakdown is often an important source of interpersonal conflict and learning communication skills is valuable in preventing and resolving such difficulties” (p. 3). By learning to dialogue, a specific type of communication specifically designed to pursue greater understanding of the other, individuals can often discover innovative solutions to problems and improve social relationships.

Within the field of adult education it has been asserted by Kasworm, Rose, and Ross-Gordon (2010), that an important aim for those in the field is to “broadly equip adults to effectively engage in the world” (p. 4) in order to live more successfully. Mounting evidence indicates that learning interpersonal skills are vital to ensuing greater success for learners when they leave the classroom, yet traditional educational techniques that primarily attend to the cognitive and/or technical components of learning often fail to equip learners with the interpersonal skills necessary to better communicate and interact

with others in the workplace and within society at large. Krizan, Merrier, Logan, and Williams (2008) state that, “today’s service economy puts a premium on people skills and relationship building” and that “cultural diversity, globalization, organizational restructuring, worker specialization, and technology contribute to the current emphasis on interpersonal skills” (p. 407). As such, “skills in effective communication, conflict resolution, and understanding of diversity and prejudice reduction will be just as essential as reading, writing, and mathematics “(Cole, 2001) and necessitates that “worker’s demonstrate aptitude at social as well as technical skills” (Myers & Larson, 2005, p. 306). As a result, educators are increasingly seeking ways to help students cultivate the necessary knowledge, perspectives, and skills needed to participate peacefully within and across diversity (Banks, 2001; Walton, 2010) including preparing learners with the skills necessary to constructively dialogue across difference.

Although dialogue has long been an important method of learning within the field of adult education, dialogue is still “a concept that is not well understood or well-practiced” (Moore, 2006, p. 123). Often, one of the major hindrances to achieving dialogue is that many people possess a limited knowledge of what differentiates dialogue from other forms of communication as well as the essential skills necessary to engage effectively in the dialogue process with others (Cayer, 1996; Alderton, 2000). A great deal of research pertaining to the definition and tenants of dialogue currently exists; however, there remains a “dearth of research on dialogue facilitation” (Evinger, 2014, p. 5). In fact, a review of the existing literature indicates both a “need for additional research concerning the role of dialogue” (Alderton, 2000, p. 11) and dialogue facilitation. Accordingly, this literature review will examine the nature of conflict, as

well as the theory of dialogue including the factors that contribute to effective engagement in the dialogue process and dialogue's potential to assist in facilitating moments of transformational learning for interlocutors.

Significance of Dialogue in Understanding Conflict

Lieberman (2013) notes that human beings are naturally social animals, are neurologically wired to be social, and are intrinsically motivated to want to connect with others. As a result, human beings have created whole societies united upon shared meaning, values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms that allows for the meeting of basic needs, including the need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance (Maslow, 1954) and to ensure survival. Human understanding and knowledge is constructed as a result of human interaction in the world and that knowledge is developed and transmitted in a social context (Dewey, 1938). The formation of societies based upon shared meaning contributes to a group's respective culture and identity and have ultimately shaped the way people living within a particular society understand and interact in the world. As put forth by Imel (1996), these cultural identities are "what is most meaningful" (p. 20) to people and serve to symbolize beliefs and values people often believe are worth protecting, sometimes to the point of war. However, people are now part of a new global society, living in unprecedented conditions of boundless complexity, diversity, rapid change, and radical inter-connectedness. Old identities, rules, models of behavior and understanding are being swept away, leaving many people feeling threatened, frustrated, and angry regarding the need to preserve their beliefs and is ultimately "shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict" at the broadest levels of civilization (Huntington, 1996, p. 20).

Sandole (2004) notes that “conflict is about human relationships” (p. 518) and is inherently communicative (Myers & Larson, 2005). It “occurs between people in all kinds of human relationships and in all social settings” (Fisher, 2000, p. 1) and is defined as “a confrontation between individuals, or groups” (Sprey, 1979, p. 134). Conflict “itself is neither good nor bad” (Fisher, 2000, p. 1) and can be constructive, rather than destructive, dependent upon how it is handled (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). In fact, conflict can be “desirable because it provides a medium through which problems are aired and solutions obtained;” (Satterlee, 2002, p. 7-8), however, “the problem with conflict is our difficulty in responding effectively to it” (Muldoon, 1996, p. 25). In effect, it is generally how individuals approach conflict and communicate with one another about issues which often determines whether the encounter will be constructive or not.

Perceived threats to social identity and/or feelings of not being valued, accepted, recognized, or heard are primary contributors of most conflicts. It is also often born of perceived injustice and/or notions of social inequality among individuals or groups (Fisher, 2000) and/or a feeling of not being valued or accepted; something human beings continuously strive for and need (Grossman, 1995; Maslow, 1954). Given the vast and rich diversity of perspectives found within today’s global human interactions, conflicts have escalated on a global scale due to different understandings and ways of responding to perceptions regarding threats to deeply held values, beliefs, and assumptions about the world and others and indicates a need for people within society to be formally educated on how to “constructively deal with issues of diversity” (Zelizer, 2015, p. 590) in order to minimize the “likelihood of social fragmentation and increased potential for violence” (p. 590). The ability to effectively dialogue is considered to be both a conflict resolution

skill and an interpersonal skill that is vitally important in transforming conflicts into constructive moments of learning and opportunities to enact positive change. Conflict resolution through the process of dialogue allows for divisive issues to be brought forth “out of the darkened waters and up to the surface where it can be seen” (Muldoon, 1996, p. 30) and allows antagonism between conflicted parties to be overcome through greater understanding of the other (Zelizer, 2015, p. 590).

Differing experiences and perspectives among people are often an important contributor to conflict, but it is the inability to effectively dialogue across those differences that frequently escalate conflict into destructive, rather than constructive situations. Globalization and interconnectedness has brought new ideas and opportunities, but it has also brought forth increased global tensions and conflicts as people struggle to understand and adapt to rapid social changes and differences in perspectives which sometimes place people and societies at odds with one another. Bohm (1996), notes that “we do not know how to live together in a changing world” (p. x), and therefore, there exists a great need to learn how to openly and respectfully exchange ideas among those with differing views especially given the diversity and interconnectedness that exists in the world today.

Although it is frequently believed that conflict “is wrong, or selfish, or should be avoided in the interest of protecting others from our own needs or expectations” (Muldoon, 1996, p. 67), “conflict has the power to transform” (p. 27) and can itself be constructive in expanding existing understandings and assumptions about ourselves, others, and the world. “Conflicts hold catalytic potential for transformation” (Meeker, 2012, p. 128; Dirkx, 2008) and can contribute to more meaningful learning when learners

are encouraged to dialogue, across difference, in a safe space where they feel respected while sharing their experiences and perspectives openly. An important component in understanding any conflict and constructively responding to it lies in considering “assumptions that are active...including one’s own personal assumptions” (Bohm, 1996, p. xi). The dialogue process “endeavors to identify the roots of assumptions and assess how those factors manifest themselves in competing perspectives and divisive problems” (Bohm, 1996, p. 9) and serves as “a testing ground for the limits of assumed knowledge (p. xxvii).

The Nature of Dialogue

“It is quite certain that at no other period in human history has there been so much talk on the need for dialogue: dialogue among members of the family, within communities, regions and countries, among various churches, religions, and nations” (Kazepides, 2012, p. 913). In fact, over the past several years, “we have witnessed an interest for dialogue in many disciplines such as education, psychology, women’s studies, sociology, management, etc.” (Cayer, 2005, p. 161). However, the facilitation of difficult dialogues across dimensions of difference within the learning environment still remains disconcerting for many educators who often prefer to avoid addressing conflict laden issues believing that conflict might hinder learning or devolve into an uncontrollable emotionally charged situation in which they are ill-prepared to manage constructively.

Indeed, many scholars from various academic disciplines including philosophy, psychology, and education have greatly contributed to the understanding and practice of dialogue including valuable ideas on what dialogue is, what differentiates it from other forms of communication, and what factors contribute to successful engagement in the

dialogue process. One such scholar, Martin Buber (1937), renowned for his philosophy of dialogue and his views on education, published his views on two types of human interactions in which human beings engage in with one another and oscillate between: the “I-Thou” and the “I-It. For Buber, “the I-Thou relation stresses the mutual and holistic existence of two entities. It is an encounter of equals, who recognize each other as such.” (Morgan & Guilherme, 2012, p. 982) He noted that it is in this type of encounter where true dialogue takes place unlike the “I-It” relation where “a being confronts another being and, by objectifying it, fails to recognize it as an equal. That is, in the ‘I-It’ relation an individual being treats things, including people, as objects to be used and experienced: they are a means to an ends” (p. 982).

Based on Buber’s description, one of the greatest challenges within society today is that individuals have increasingly failed to recognize others who possess a different point of view as a “Thou” worthy of respect. Instead, there appears to be increasing polarization among individuals within society stemming from the rise of a progressively more argumentative culture that encourages people to approach others in the world with an increasingly adversarial frame of mind (Tannen, 1998). The failure to recognize individuals as “Thou” rather than “It” hinders individuals from engaging in meaningful and productive interpersonal dialogues and often promotes a kind of posturing within a great deal of communication that places people on one side or the other rather than as collaborators trying to learn and understand each other’s points of view.

David Bohm (1996) describes dialogue as something very different than what many people believe it to be. He asserted that dialogue is not simply a conversation, discussion, or debate, but is instead a process of creating and sharing meaning through

words which enables individuals to “think together” rather than defend and argue pre-existing assumptions or personal “truths.” For Bohm, the greatest hindrance to true and effective dialogue is the attachment to existing opinions and ideas which people experience as truth and defend, as though an extension of self, requiring defense when challenged by another’s ideas. Frequently, the challenges in fostering dialogues across difference are that people are more inclined to debate, rather than listening to understand. Instead, the conversation is more often about convincing someone else that their position is right and the other is wrong; something that we see rather frequently played out in public events, especially in the political arena.

Negative patterns of communication which are often learned informally from prior experiences with family, others within society and within the media frequently exacerbate conflict in destructive ways due to polarized thinking, misunderstandings, mistaken assumptions, and the concept of moralism. As explained by conflict resolution practitioner Brian Muldoon (1996) “*moralism*” “is the habit of dividing the world into those who are right and those who are wrong” (p. 24) and is driven by the “struggle to dominate” (p. 46), rather than the desire to seek new understandings and ways of being that are more inclusive and equitable for human beings across an increasingly global society. According to Bohm, dialogue should consist of meaningful interaction and exchange between people, particularly from different groups and/or backgrounds who come together to increase understanding through conversation and interactions. It is through the practice of dialogue that individuals can learn to better understand others and overcome a tendency towards polarization.

William Isaacs (1999) described dialogue as “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking

and reflecting together” (p. 9) which requires five elements for constructive engagement: respect, listening to understand, suspending judgement, freeing oneself, and communicating your reasoning process. Isaacs, like Buber and Bohm, noted that respect is a vital component in successful dialogue because dialogue itself is a cooperative activity and requires interlocutors to engage in active listening and speak in respectful and non-inflammatory tones without blame and/or accusation (Bolton, 1979). Further, engagement in the dialogue process necessitates that people come to understand that dialogue is different from other forms of communication such as conversation, discussion, debate, negotiation, or deliberation in that it seeks primarily to enhance and broaden understanding among participants. In essence, dialogue is the difference between conversing to understand, rather than conversing to convince and is concerned with *meaning* (Bohm, 1996) rather than arriving at *truth* or agreement.

Kasl and Yorks (2016) note that, “dialogue is a verbal exchange between individuals who are each rooted in personal experience” (p. 6) and is a process that requires interlocutors to suspend judgement and seek simply to try and understand another’s experience (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999; Kasl & Yorks, 2016). Dialogue’s aim is to change relationships “in ways that create new grounds for mutual respect and collaboration” (Saunders, 1999, p. 85). It is a process that endeavors to identify the roots of assumptions and assess how those factors manifest themselves in competing perspectives and divisive problems (Bohm, 1996, p. 9). It encourages participants to open their minds, absorb new views, re-think assumptions, and modify judgments (Saunders, 1999, p. 82) which can enhance and broaden understanding among participants and can lead to bringing about important changes among individuals and

whole societies. Ultimately, dialogue seeks to create “a totally new basis from which its participants begin to think and act” (Allen, 2007, p. 12).

Dialogic Education

The interest in dialogue as part of the learning process can be traced back to Socrates and Plato (Nightingale, 2000) and is often associated with Socratic dialogue where the seeker of knowledge is actively and continuously engaged in the process of questioning what is “known” in order to reveal underlying assumptions or “truths” (Burbules & Bruce, 2001). Socratic dialogue has been used for centuries as a method of engaging learners in critical thinking and in sharing ideas as a way of contributing to shared knowledge and meaning. Dialogue contributes markedly to significant learning because learning often begins when people endeavor to question the origins and reasoning pertaining to existing ideas, thoughts, and beliefs. By presenting ideas to others and encountering others’ points of view, learners clarify, expand, and attune their thinking” (Kasl & Yorks, 2016, p. 4).

Within the field of adult education, dialogue has served as an important and popular educational approach which has been informed by various educators including Malcom Knowles, Paulo Freire, and Jane Vella. “Dialogic education means teaching *for* dialogue as well as teaching *through* dialogue” (Wegerif, 2010, p. 18) and is an important component within adult education because it is a method that allows adult learners to be actively engaged in the learning process. Andragogy, defined as the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1970) is comprised of two central concepts: learners as self-directed and autonomous and the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning rather than an all-knowing presenter of knowledge. Knowles asserts that classrooms should be

learner-centered rather than teacher-centered because adults possess a vast reservoir of experience that serves as an important resource for learning. Learner-centered environments depend on active participation by the learners and often revolve around the practice of dialogue because it allows for the sharing of experiences and knowledge which allows learners to engage in the process of knowledge construction. The dialogue process is also a way in which people, particularly of different groups and backgrounds, are able to come together to engage in meaningful interactions and exchanges in order to increase understanding. Through dialogue, individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, ages, etc. are able to share their unique perspectives and begin to recognize that “events are interpreted differently by different people” (Reidel & Salinas, 2011, p. 2), thereby, contributing to greater understanding and learning.

Through the work of Paulo Freire, the practice of dialogue has contributed to democratizing the learning process and has come to be seen as a process that liberates because it empowers individuals to have their voice heard and acknowledges that they “have the right to interpret the world and create knowledge” (Avoseh, 2005, p. 377) rather than passively receiving it. Freire (1970) believed that “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 73). Thus, teaching with and through dialogue requires that the learning environment shift the focus of education from the teacher to the learner who is actively encouraged to engage with what is to be learned through dialogue, thereby, providing a space to voice thoughts and empowering learners to become co-creators of knowledge. Rather than having the educator “impose” knowledge on the learner, learners begin to become “liberated” and empowered to recognize that their voice matters.

Unlike Bohm, Buber, or Isaacs, who each assert that dialogue's primary purpose is on enhancing understanding through "shared inquiry" (Bohm, 1996) so that people are better able to think together (Isaacs, 1999), Freire adds two additional concepts that stem from dialogic engagement: conscientization and praxis. For Freire, he believed that the practice of dialogue instills in learners an awareness that they possess the capacity to act in the world and change it if needed; a process described by Freire (1970) as conscientization which heightens one's critical awareness so they are able to uncover problems and needs that require action. Additionally, he believed that dialogue alone was not enough, but rather individuals need to come together through action in order to transform oppressive social realities-praxis. Although conscientization and praxis are part of Freire's concept for dialogue, other dialogue theorists including Bohm, Buber, and Isaacs indicate that through the practice of dialogue people are able to come together and gain broader understandings of their social reality and can act together to transform existing, oppressive realities through action and critical reflection, but it is not the primary aim of dialogue, but rather an outcome often associated with it due to an increase in awareness and understanding. In essence, dialogue is an important first step in preparing "a group to take collective action-or at least to have a healthy exploration of whether such action is possible" (Schirch & Camp, 2007, p. 22). Engaging in the dialogue process can and often does motivate people to move from talk to action and has been used as a method for social change; however, most of the theorists noted, with the exception of Freire, do not mandate action.

The field of adult education, informed greatly by the work of Freire, has dedicated itself to seeking ways of promoting social justice. As such, adult educators are often

committed to nurturing an environment where learners are provided space to participate in dialogue and critical reflection in order to promote more meaningful learning in relation to social justice issues. Through engagement in the dialogue process, individuals are involved in a group learning process that provides a space for them to critically evaluate their understanding of self, others, their community, and their world. They are also able to share “personal experience as a source of knowledge” (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 266) in the learning environment. Dialogue “has been described as the way that domination, subjugation, privileged claims to truth, and the power of difference are negotiated and mediated in conversations and classrooms” (Tarule, 1992, p. 12) and enables learners to “question, challenge, and deconstruct difficult topics around social identity that may engender conflict” (Evinger, 2014, p.2). It provides a space where “adults learn to penetrate the givens of everyday reality to reveal the inequity and oppression that lurk beneath” (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 257) and serves as a useful tool in inviting “students to construct rather than reproduce knowledge” (Tarule, 1992, p. 16).

In Freirean terms, dialogue has also been described as “a form of democratic practice, engagement, problem solving, and education involving face-to-face, focused, facilitated, and confidential discussions occurring over time between two or more groups of people defined by their different social identities” (Allen, 2007, p.1) and is increasingly being recognized as a method for resolving conflict. Teaching through dialogue is about “teaching a different way of relating” and a “way of talking that enables people to interact peacefully in transforming their relationships and resolving their problems” (Saunders, 2001, p. 41-42). Dialogue is an approach that considers mutual respect and communication as central principles whereby participants enter into dialogue

with one another as equals in an environment of trust and mutual respect and “should not involve one person acting on another, but rather people working with each other” (Freire, 1972). Additionally, Freire (1970) notes that the central conditions for establishing what he refers to as critical dialogues are “love, humility, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking” (p. 62-65).

Jane Vella (2002) has built upon the ideas of both Knowles and Freire and has contributed much to current practices pertaining to dialogic education. Like Knowles and Freire, Vella believes that the learner must be actively engaged in what they are learning rather than passive receivers of knowledge from an all-knowing teacher. She notes that dialogue is important in “building a civil society that can distinguish domination from democracy” (p. xiv) and believes that how people interact and learn in the educational setting “is a powerful force in developing how we live and work in the world” (p. 29). Vella notes that dialogue education does not only facilitate effective learning, but it is an approach that can contribute to making society a place of peace (Vella, 2002, p. xix) because through the practice of dialogue learners begin to recognize that they and others possess insights, experiences, and knowledge that are all worthy of respect. Furthermore, she notes that dialogue is an important practice for sustaining democracy because dialogue education shares the same democratic values of inquiry, integrity, and commitment to equality and involves the removal of a hierarchal learning environment in favor of a more democratic and equal space where “the dialogue is not a dialogue between teachers and learner, but among learners, of whom the teacher is one” (p. xxi).

For Vella, the incorporation of dialogue into the learning environment is important both in communication and in understanding and is the focus of her

educational practice. In fact, she notes that all twelve of her teaching principles: Needs assessment, safety, sound relationships, sequence of content and reinforcement, praxis, respect, ideas feelings and actions, immediacy, clear roles, teamwork, engagement, and accountability “are ways to begin, maintain, and nurture” (Vella, 2002, p. 4) dialogue in the learning environment. One of Jane Vella’s principles for effective dialogue *safety* is particularly important in the dialogue process and includes ensuring learners feel safe in a learning environment that is respectful, nonjudgmental, and acknowledges the value of what every individual contributes to the learning process. Additionally, Vella makes a connection between what she calls “quantum thinking and the humanistic, integrated approach of dialogue education” (p. 30). She explains that historically people and education have held a view of the world as a “mechanistic world...which sees the whole as merely the sum of its parts” (p. 30) rather than recognizing the relatedness and connectedness of all things. This fragmented or separate way of seeing the world prevents the learner from engaging with and learning with others in order to construct more holistic perspectives and understandings.

Collaborative Learning and Dialogue

Dialogue lends itself well to a particular kind of group learning known as collaborative learning, “a special type of teaching and learning in which participants engage in co-construction of new knowledge” (Peters & Armstrong, 1998, p. 75) through direct engagement with others. In fact, “there is increasing agreement among those who study classrooms that learning is likely to be most effective when students are actively involved in the dialogic co-construction of meaning about topics that are of significance to them” (Wells & Arauz, 2006, p. 379) and that “understanding dialogue is an essential

foundation for good teaching in the classroom” (Moore, 2006, p. 123). Educators who employ dialogue convert many classroom experiences into collaborative learning opportunities that engage learners in the exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences in an effort to facilitate greater learning. In a collaborative learning group each person participates and collectively contributes to one another’s understanding and learning. Much of the research regarding collaborative learning shows that people actually learn much better when they interact as a group rather than traditional learning models that primarily focus on a student’s independent and individual learning.

Another benefit of collaborative learning through dialogue is that often, in groups of individuals working together, there is usually already existing diversity among its members which can enhance learning. People from different backgrounds, cultures, ages, etc. all have a unique perspective that can be shared, thereby, contributing a wider understanding of the subject being discussed. This not only allows students to reflect on others’ understanding, thereby, advancing their knowledge, but helps students recognize that there are many ways of understanding. Learning in groups through the process of dialogue can foster the ability in a student to work and learn alongside others, not only in the classroom, but they can apply that experience of collaboration to their organizations and to the world at large. Interlocutors often learn to respect and value differences and are better equipped to use those strengths throughout their lives.

Transformational Learning Theory

There is much literature which suggests that “group experiences can foster substantive adult learning and transformative development when participants’ assumptions, perspectives, and meaning structures are challenged through critical

reflection and dialogical communication” (Walton, 2010; Bohm, 1996; Freire, 1972; Isaacs, 1999; Mezirow, 1994, 1997). As an adult educator, making space for challenging assumptions and beliefs as well as promoting critical reflection through dialogue is important to facilitating transformational change in learners. However, a great deal of education still consists largely of passive, lecture-based instruction that does not engage learners through dialogue or capitalize on the richness and diversity found within the classroom. Current teaching practices in many settings are still largely instructor-led and focus primarily on concepts and knowledge rather than critical thinking or dialogue. Encouraging and modelling empathetic and respectful dialogue is an important component in transformative learning and is a process whereby “one’s subconscious belief systems and unexamined frames of reference are made conscious and critically evaluated by the intellect in the public forum” (Cunningham, 2014, p. 4).

The dialogue process can be a transformative experience that changes the ways in which people see themselves and others and helps people to communicate across divides. It is through the process of dialogue where differing perspectives and interpretations of events can be shared in order to formulate new and innovative ideas and/or solutions that might greatly benefit society’s ability to adapt to and meet the needs of various groups therein. Through dialogue, individuals are able to learn about “conflict *as the other person experiences it*” (Muldoon, 1996, p. 83) and are better able to discover means to bring the cacophony of many voices and perspectives to the surface in the hopes of arriving collectively on a just and encompassing vision (Marsick & Watkins, 1994, p. 355) for all members within society. Additionally, through the engagement in the dialogue process, individuals can learn a new frame of reference and, possibly, a

transformed point of view.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) note that “transformative or transformational learning is about change – dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (p. 130) and often entails the critical questioning of frameworks of meaning and social discourse, making problematic existing ways of seeing and doing and through changes in understanding and perspective, personal and social transformations become possible (Fetherston & Kelly, 2007). Mezirow (2000) states that “transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in one of our beliefs or attitudes or a transformation of our entire perspective” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 133) and is “the process by which people learn to develop and then integrate new assumptions into existing schemes and perspectives” (Brookfield, 2010, p.78). Mezirow’s theory highlights the importance of social discourse in transformative learning because it permits ideas and assumptions to be addressed openly and lends itself to facilitating “disorienting dilemmas”, critical reflection, and the evaluation of assumptive beliefs among interlocutors.

Emotions in the Dialogue Process

There appears to be an increasing awareness within educational literature that “emotional components have long been neglected in institutional education” and “this tendency or preference in which reason has been valued over emotion in learning situations has led to an overall lack of attention to the emotional aspects of teaching and learning in a classroom environment” (Van Aacken, 2013, p. 21, 22-23). In fact, “transformative learning has itself widened to account for holistic, somatic, and emotional dimensions” (Brookfield, 2010, p. 78) and recognizes that emotions play a

significant role in transformative learning. Dirkx (2008) notes that “adult learners most likely experience strong emotions around areas of conflict” (p. 16) highlighting for educators that they must recognize and be prepared for the reality that within dialogues, particularly when the issues discussed are deeply personal or meaningful, emotions will often be involved and will necessitate particular understanding and skill to navigate effectively. Engaging in dialogue requires more than simply cognitive understanding; it is also often an emotional experience for the interlocutor. “As adult educators, we want to ensure that groups are positive forces that contribute to learning rather than negative experiences that diminish learning” (Imel & Tisdell, 1996, p. 15) and by “anticipating the discomfort involved in engaging conflicts” educators can better prepare themselves “to attend to the emotional dimensions of learning” that often contributes significantly to transformational learning (Meeker, 2012, p. 133).

Summary of Literature Review

Chapter two presented a review of the literature concerning facilitating dialogues in the learning environment and was divided into six main themes: why dialogue matters, significance of dialogue in understanding conflict, the nature of dialogue, transformational learning theory, and emotions in the dialogue process. In sum, the literature has outlined that the learning environment provides a unique opportunity for learners to practice constructively engaging in dialogues across difference as well as the pro social skills associated with dialogue so that they are better prepared to understand and manage conflicts they will inevitably encounter when they leave the learning environment. The literature highlights that dialogue matters because strong interpersonal skills including the ability to constructively dialogue across difference are increasingly

being identified as important attributes for success both personally and professionally. As such, the need to communicate effectively across differences of race, ethnicity, age, gender, culture, religion, political orientation, and in different contextual situations is an important skill useful for individuals to learn and practice, particularly because few public forums allow for or model dialogue.

Additionally, the literature highlights that dialogue can serve as an important educational tool that enables people to practice respectful and open exchanges of ideas which significantly contributes to learning and can also serve to foster a desire for individuals to pursue active engagement in their communities towards social justice reform and can build bridges of understanding between groups, thereby, reducing misunderstandings and tensions that can create conflict situations. The constructive engagement in dialogue was also noted as being integral to the success of any attempt to resolve conflict, whether individual, group/institutional, or global.

The literature also highlights that diversity is a major feature within the educational landscape, and requires educators to be both skillful at working with people from different and diverse backgrounds as well as proficient in actively engaging learners with meaningful learning that prepares them to interact successfully with others across difference. As such, the learning environment presents opportunities for people of different backgrounds to interact and dialogue which, prepares learners to effectively engage with others in various areas of their lives and allows them to more creatively cooperate with different people to achieve desirable outcomes.

It was noted that dialogue is a different kind of communication that allows learners to not only engage with what is to be learned, but has proven to be an important

factor in promoting moments of transformational learning, whereby, learners often undergo a “perspective transformation” (Mezirow, 1997) as a result of dialogue engagement with others who possess different points of views or experiences. Finally, the literature highlights that emotions are frequently a part of the dialogue experience, particularly difficult dialogues over conflict laden topics, and that emotions themselves have proven to play a significant role in transformational learning. Accordingly, it is important that educators learn to allow a space for and navigate emotions if they are to successfully facilitate dialogues in the learning environment. The review of the literature, however, pointed to key gaps to be addressed by this study. Few studies were located focusing on facilitating dialogue exists. And, while dialogue has long been an important method of learning within the field of adult education, Moore (2006) suggests that dialogue is still “a concept that is not well understood or well-practiced” (p. 123).

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to initiate inquiry into how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding constructively engage adults in dialogue across difference as well as demonstrate dialogue's potential to assist interlocutors in questioning constructions that may lend themselves to transformational perspectives. I developed three guiding research questions to support my overall research question: *How do educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding constructively engage adults in dialogues across difference?* Specifically, I asked (1) *What factors do educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process?* (2) *How do these educators involved within a dialogue pertaining to conflictual content and diverse perspectives manage emotions, their own and those of others, when they emerge?* and (3) *What, if any, indications are there that the process of engaging in difficult dialogues across points of difference contributes to transformed perspectives?*

Research Design

For this research, I selected to use a qualitative multiple case study methodology in order to examine how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding prepare adults to constructively engage in dialogues across difference and determine how interlocutors believe the dialogue process has contributed to their learning. Case study research “involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 97). In order to conduct a case study, “the identification of a specific case” (p. 98) or “cases” must

occur. I selected a multiple case study because it allows the researcher to explore comparisons and contrasts within and between cases (Yin, 1994) in order to gain a more in depth understanding of the experiences of the subjects involved in this study. Consequently, I purposefully selected seven participants from various conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding programs across the Washington D.C. metro area who educate adults in and through the practice of dialogue across differences of age, gender, culture, religion, political orientation, and other conflictual, difficult, and/or emotion-laden topics. Each participant served as an individual “case,” or unit of analysis, in this research study and the data collected from each case also allowed for a cross-case analysis of the data. By using case study as my approach to research, I was able to focus on obtaining an in-depth understanding of my selected cases in order to discover what insiders who work in these fields believe are some of the most important and valuable lessons they have learned from their experiences preparing people to constructively engage in dialogue across difference as well as ascertain whether or not participants experienced moments of transformational learning while engaged in the dialogue process.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to select my participants using a criterion-based sampling strategy. Consequently, participants were “selected because they are ‘information rich’ and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). Individuals selected for participation in this project were purposefully selected from various conflict resolution, diplomacy, and peacebuilding programs across the Washington D.C. metro area that educate and engage adults in and through the practice of dialogue across differences of age, gender, race,

culture, religion, political orientation, and/or other conflictual topics. The study's participants consisted of seven educators, who:

- Have facilitated dialogues for three years or more in various adult learning environments including the community college classroom, the university, the community, and/or the workplace;
- Have facilitated dialogues using a face-to face format;
- Have facilitated/engaged with what might be considered difficult dialogues;
- Have been introspective about their engagement with these dialogues, and have learned something about themselves, teaching and/or educating adults; and
- Who demonstrated a willingness to discuss their facilitation experiences.

The participant selection process began first by identifying a pool of participants from universities, governmental, military, and civilian organizations throughout the Washington DC metro area that matched my selection criteria. Once a list of individuals potentially corresponding to study criteria was developed, I began the process of participant selection by contacting each participant via an invitational email which contained a statement about my study and what their involvement would entail (see appendix A). Those who agreed were scheduled for the first interview with me that was approximately an hour and a half in duration and were sent an email to confirm the date, time, and location of the interview.

Data Collection

The study followed the qualitative research approach of case study and employed a variety of methods to gather my data including: two semi-structured interviews with each participant, a critical incident reflection from each, and the collection of documents. The table below (Table 1) maps out data collection sources and procedures.

Table 1

Data Collection Sources

Interviews	Critical Incident Reflections	Document Collection
Two semi-structured, open-ended interviews per participant: 1-1.5 hour interview and 1-30-45 minute follow-up interview.	One critical incident reflection document emailed to each participant after first interview.	Instructional materials, lesson plans, syllabi, texts, or any item noted by participant as being important to them.
Audio recorded, conversational style interviews following an interview question guide.	Each participant was asked to describe, in writing, a difficult dialogue they have facilitated.	Collected during interviews in order to add richness to data and allow participant(s) to provide greater description and detail.

Each interview involved the use of semi-structured interviews or “specified questions” (Glense, 2011, p. 134) conducted in a conversational style and scheduled at a time that was convenient to each participant (see appendix C). The interviews took place in a location selected by each participant, with each session being audio recorded and transcribed to guarantee accuracy of records. By audio recording the interview, I was better able to focus on the educator and his/her responses. Each participant in my study was asked essentially the same set of questions to facilitate the cross-case analysis of interviews for reoccurring categories and themes, although the flow of individual interviews was flexible enough to clarify questions and to follow up as appropriate within the interview.

The first series of interviews were approximately one and a half hours in duration with the second, with follow-up interviews running 30-45 minutes in duration. Prior to

the interview with each participant, I asked each participant to read and review a consent document outlining what participation involved (see Appendix B). Each participant read and signed a consent form permitting the session to be audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Consent was obtained before the interviewee began participation in the study. All participants had the opportunity to review the transcriptions, if desired, at a later date to ensure accuracy and to permit any follow-up questions or comments by the participant.

I also asked participants to recall a specific incident, critical to their facilitation of a difficult dialogue. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) explain that critical incident reflection is valuable when used in conjunction with interview data because it allows for greater insight into personal perceptions regarding experiences “that may not have been uncovered during the interview process, especially concerning faculty emotional struggles” (Murray-Johnson, 2015, p. 90). Prior to the first interview with participants, I provided in person or via email a written prompt for a critical incident reflection document (see Appendix D) that asked each participant to describe, in as much detail as possible, a difficult dialogue they have facilitated. It asked them to describe the incident, how they felt during the dialogue, how they reacted to the situation, and what they learned from the experience. The critical incident reflection documents were collected in writing or via email from each participant. Finally, I collected documents including instructional materials, lesson plans, syllabi, and texts participants indicated would enhance understanding of the dialogue process and its facilitation in their particular learning environment. Collecting and analyzing these documents allowed me to better triangulate the data provided by the participants as well as gain a better understanding of

the materials used by participants in order to facilitate dialogues in the learning environment.

Data Analysis

All of the data collected including audio-recorded interviews, transcriptions, critical incident reflections, and any documents provided by the participants were stored and analyzed both manually and electronically. “Analyzing text and multiple forms of data presents a formidable task for qualitative researchers” (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 139) so MAXQDA software was used to assist in storing, organizing, and analyzing collected data. MAXQDA offers “a single location for storage that provides easy access to material and the ability to handle large amounts of data with consistent coding schemes” (Bergin, 2011, p. 6) so researchers are better able to access research material and identify patterns in the data that speak to the research questions. The software assists with coding the data and allows for the creation of a color coding system organized around different topics and/or themes found within the data which can then be depicted in a summary report that lists the codes and all associated text and quotes pertaining to each code. “Hard copies” of all computer files of data were also coded using colored pens to mark the margins with appropriate numbers and letters where needed.

I also wrote analytic memos in my research journal throughout the data collection process in order to capture important thoughts, insights, and reflections obtained from interviews and critical incident reflections. The analytic memos were used to record researcher insights and thoughts about analysis and reflect on relationships between themes that emerged from the data. As noted by Saldañá (2009), analytic memos are important to reflect on:

- How you personally relate to the participants and/or the phenomenon
- Your study's research questions
- Your code choices and their operational definitions
- The emergent patterns, categories, themes, and concepts
- The possible networks (links, connections, overlaps, flows) among the codes,
- Patterns, categories, themes and concepts
- An emergent or related existent theory
- Any problems with the study
- Future directions for the study
- The analytic memos generated thus far
- The final report for the study (p. 40)

Analytic memos written while analyzing data were also transferred to MAXQDA software, in order to record important notes about the interviews, the participants, the setting, and interactions.

Since this was a multiple case study, I conducted “two stages of analysis – within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 204). I began first by analyzing each case individually and once each one has been analyzed, I began cross-case analysis in an “attempt to build abstractions across cases” and “a general explanation that fits the individual cases” (p. 204). For this research I used open and focused coding, thematic analysis, and cross-case analysis as techniques for analyzing my data.

According to Saldanã (2013) a code is “a word, phrase, or sentence that represents aspect(s) of a data” and is the first step in developing future categories and themes derived from the data. He describes coding “as a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or “families” because they share some characteristic – the beginning of a pattern” (p. 9). I began my data analysis with open coding, a process that “involves reading the data and *developing* your coding categories, based on what data (including the participants’ terms and categories) seem most important” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). For this first cycle of coding, I employed a method

of open coding known as in-vivo coding where “a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (Saldañá, 2013, p. 91) was captured from the language used by the participants rather than code words or terms created by the researcher. While reviewing the data, I took note of words, concepts, and/or ideas that seemed to be heavily emphasized throughout the interview transcripts and critical incident reflections and created a list of codes. Different parts of the data were marked with appropriate labels or ‘codes’ to identify them for further analysis.

For the next cycle of coding, I used focused coding which “searches for the most frequent or significant initial codes to develop the most salient categories” (Saldañá, 2009, p. 178). I went through several rounds of focused coding; adjusting and readjusting categories till the most salient themes emerged from the collected data (Murray-Johnson, 2015). Throughout the process I engaged in constant case comparison and thematic analysis whereby the “researcher focuses analytical techniques on searching through the data for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011, p. 187) which emerged from the data “through inductive processes of comparing data with data, data with category, category with category, and category with concept” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 187). I continuously went through the data and examined it closely to compare for relations, similarities, and dissimilarities. Coding, categorizing, and theme building was conducted for each research question and a coding system was generated with numbers and letters used to designate major categories and subcategories and organized around different topics and themes identified inductively from the data. From the categories identified, I generated themes related to each research question that seemed dominant in describing how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or

peacebuilding constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference in order to assist me with the organization of the data for portrayal in my final document.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the course of this study several strategies were employed to ensure trustworthiness, which Creswell (2003) suggests requires adhering to significant features of research design and implementation including standards of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the research. In this study, the collection of data from multiple sources including interviews, participant critical incident reflections, and documents all helped to establish credibility in that the use of multiple sources allowed me to compare and substantiate information collected. I collected my data through a variety of methods, which Patton (2002) describes as, “data triangulation, the use of a variety of data sources in a study” (p. 247). It “involves using different methods as a check on one another, seeing if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion” (Maxwell, 2013, p.102). By utilizing a variety of methods, I not only enhanced my understanding of my cases, but I was able to establish greater credibility and rigor to this study’s findings.

In addition, I attempted to enhance credibility or accuracy of my data by incorporating a process known as respondent validation or member checks. Respondent validation is a process “of soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying” (p.126). Once I transcribed the interviews, I emailed a copy to each of my participants for their review to check that I understood and interpreted what each participant intended to share and to ensure that I accurately recorded the experience and meaning of the participants before moving forward with my data analysis. As an

additional member check, each participant was asked follow up questions based on comments made during the first interview during the second interview. Finally, I tried to incorporate verbatim quotes from participants where possible to further enhance credibility.

To strengthen the dependability of my research, I employed the use of semi-structured interviews to ensure that all participants were asked the same core questions and engaged in continuous coding across the data to ensure analysis dependability. Confirmability was achieved by examining transcripts, reflections, journal entries, collected documents, and categories and themes derived from case and cross case analysis in order to ensure that the findings are accurate and emerged from the data. With regard to transferability of the findings of this study, the reported data attempts to provide enough information so that others interested in facilitating difficult dialogues in the learning environment are better able to decide what is applicable and transferrable to them within their own settings and/or contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the course of this study ethical considerations were considered and incorporated following the guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) pertaining to research with humans. Each participant was sent, via email, an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix A) which provided a brief description of the study, my interest as a researcher, and an outline of what participants could expect if they agreed to participate in the study. Additionally, prior to conducting each initial interview, each participant was provided a consent form (see Appendix B) where they were provided the opportunity to read and then sign. Each participant was made aware

that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any question that they felt uncomfortable answering and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The privacy of my participants was protected through the non-disclosure of participant names during the course of the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and participant names and other identifiers were not placed on research data in order to protect their identity and respect their privacy. Additionally, I provided general descriptions of the various workplaces of my participants in order to further protect their privacy. Care was also taken in the construction of participant profiles so as not to provide so much information as to make participants identifiable. Written transcripts from interviews and critical incident reflection documents were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office and any information uploaded on my computer was coded and placed in a password protected computer file which will be stored for up to three years following the completion of my study. Audio transcripts were destroyed once the transcription process was completed and the written record produced was approved by the participant as having been transcribed accurately.

Summary of Methodology

In summary, this research was conducted as a qualitative case study which sought to discover how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference. The primary questions explored within this research included *what factors do experienced educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process; how do these educators involved within a dialogue pertaining to conflictual content and*

diverse perspectives manage emotions, their own and those of others, when they emerge; and what, if any, indications are there that the process of engaging in difficult dialogues across points of difference contributes to transformed perspectives? The study included seven participants who each served as individual cases and were purposefully selected from various conflict resolution, diplomacy, and peacebuilding programs across the Washington D.C. metro area who educate adults in and through the practice of dialogue across differences of age, gender, culture, religion, political orientation, and as they relate to controversial topics. This study employed a variety of methods to gather data including: two semi-structured interviews with each participant, a critical incident reflection from each, and the collection of various documents. The data was collected, analyzed for categories and themes, and interpreted to better understand how these educators constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference.

IV. FINDINGS

The purpose of conducting this qualitative case study was to explore how educators who engage in the work of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference. It was hoped that the analysis of these findings might contribute further to the thought, practice, and facilitation of dialogue, particularly where conflicting perspectives exist. Three research questions served as the basis of this inquiry: (1) *What factors do experienced educators engaged in the work of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process;* (2) *How do these educators involved within a dialogue pertaining to conflictual content and diverse perspectives manage emotions, their own and those of others, when they emerge;* and (3) *What, if any, indications are there that the process of engaging in difficult dialogues across points of difference contributes to transformed perspectives?* Participants were asked to discuss their views pertaining to the topic of dialogue, their definition of dialogue and its process, the management of emotions, as well as their views of how engaging in the process of dialogue may have been transformative for them.

This chapter presents the findings of this study. The report of the findings begins with a description of the study participants and highlights how they describe the practice of dialogue in general. Next, dominant themes that emerged from cross case analysis of the data collected from each of the seven participants pertaining to the practice of dialogue in the learning environment are presented, including specific quotes that represent individual themes. For ease of organization and understanding, the major themes that emerged from the collected data have been organized under sections related

to each of the three research questions. It was hoped the analysis of these findings might assist educators, across disciplines, better understand the nature and purpose of dialogue, important skills necessary for its facilitation, as well as the role it might play in contributing to moments of transformational learning for interlocutors.

Overview of Participants

Data were collected from seven study participants over the course of four months through the use of two qualitative interviews per participant and the collection of a critical incident reflection document submitted by each participant. Individuals selected for participation in this research were purposefully selected from various conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding programs across the Washington D.C. metro area that educate and engage adults in and through the practice of dialogue across differences of age, gender, race, culture, religion, political orientation, and/or other conflictual topics. The participant selection process began first by identifying a pool of participants that matched selection criteria and were selected from the following settings:

Table 2

Participant Workplace Settings

Participant #	Participant Setting
Participant 1	United States Military Chaplain Corps
Participant 2	Institute Specializing in Sustained Dialogue
Participant 3	Center Focused on Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Education
Participant 4	United States Governmental Agency Involved in Diplomacy
Participant 5	A University Program Focused on Facilitating Dialogues Across Difference
Participant 6	A University Program in Conflict Resolution
Participant 7	Center focused on Cooperative Resolution

Although each participant currently works in some way or another within one of the three afore mentioned disciplines: conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding, participants initially came from a variety of disciplines including law, divinity and counseling, sociology, psychology, conflict analysis and resolution, and education. The participants' experiences with facilitating dialogue ranged from 12 to 35 years, with the majority having more than 15 years of experience. All seven participants possessed graduate level degrees, including two PhDs and one juris doctorate. The gender split among the participants included four females and three males. The ages of the participants ranged from late twenties to late sixties and included five White, non-Hispanic participants, one Hispanic, and one African American.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Education	Discipline	Experience
John	Male	Master of Divinity (M.Div.)	Divinity & Counseling	20+
Lisa	Female	Master of Arts (MA)	Sociology	18+
Sam	Male	Juris Doctorate (JD)	Law	15+
Julia	Female	Master of Arts (MA)	Education	20+
Sandra	Female	Master of Education (MEd)	Education	12+
Vicki	Female	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	Conflict Resolution	30+
Martin	Male	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	Psychology	35+

Personal Profiles of Participants

During the interviews, participants shared their professional backgrounds and

experiences with facilitating difficult dialogues across difference. Each offered glimpses into their work facilitating difficult dialogues through the stories they shared. Although each participant emerged from differing educational and occupational backgrounds, it was apparent that the participants shared similar points of view, characteristics, and experiences pertaining to the process and nature of dialogue and the criteria necessary for successful dialogue interaction. Interviews with participants as well as critical incident reflection documents collected from each provided a deeper understanding of how these educators constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference as well as identified various factors that contribute to effective engagement in the dialogue process.

John

My first interview was with John, a very senior chaplain with more than twenty years of experience in his field. Initially, John was concerned that he might not be the “right” participant for my study because he thought this study was being conducted with participants who identified themselves as conflict resolution educators, rather than on educators who engage in the work of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding through dialogue. As indicated previously, the term conflict resolution in this study is defined as “any process used to manage, determine, or settle differences that may arise among individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, nations, or any other social unit” (Barsky, 2009); a definition which certainly captured John’s work. Additionally, he was not sure if he met my criteria as an educator because he considers himself to be more of a counselor, but this study’s definition of educator was defined broadly as someone who facilitates the learning of others as well as the learning of teams and organizations, across a variety of contexts, reflecting understanding of the term

“educator” within the field of adult education. Once I clarified for John the definitions used in this study to determine the criterion for participation, he felt assured that he was an appropriate participant for this study. As we continued to talk, it became very evident that his entire career was based on educating others, particularly through the use of conflict resolution techniques which he often employed during counseling sessions, critical incident stress debriefing sessions for deployed American Soldiers coping with loss and grief after improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, and interfaith discussions with and among clergy from other faiths and denominations.

John shared that throughout his career he has brought various types of individuals and groups together to engage in the dialogue process including military personnel, military couples and families, fellow clergy members, and prisoners. When asked how he first became acquainted with and learned to facilitate dialogues John noted that “Really, you are trying to facilitate a dialogue when you're doing any form of counseling”.

Lisa

I first met Lisa while attending a Peacebuilding Seminar for educators in the Washington D.C. area. Lisa is a managing director in her organization and works to train, mentor, and provide guidance to a broad range of institutions and individuals seeking to transform their communities through the process of dialogue. Additionally, she has worked with students, faculty, senior administrators, campus leaders, and facilitators to build lasting structures for inclusion on campuses. Lisa noted that she has a passion for developing college student leaders with civic competency and cultural humility. She not only works within the United States, but globally.

Lisa’s work centers on the practice of dialogue, specifically the five-stage process

of *Sustained Dialogue* originally developed by founder Hal Saunders, a former United States Assistant Secretary of State and expert on conflict resolution (Saunders, Tukey, Lazarus, & Fitzgerald, 2011). Lisa informed me that:

There are two goals within *sustained dialogue*. The first is to address concrete community problems; so an action piece. The second is to build relationships across lines of difference that wouldn't otherwise exist. There's this piece of bringing people together so that their relationships are transformed in a way that permits new actions to take place.

She shared that she has always been interested in issues of identity, race, ethnicity, citizenship, nationality, gender, and class; and that her initial aspirations were to earn a law degree from her university, a very prestigious and well known Ivy League university in the United States. However, her experience as an undergraduate changed her aspirations and introduced her to the concept and practice of sustained dialogue. At that time she joined a group on campus where she received formal training in sustained dialogue; a grassroots style training that involved organizing and facilitating long term sustained dialogues approximately every two weeks for the length of the academic year rather than one-time events on tough topics. She shared that while she was an undergraduate, she participated actively as a moderator and leader of many of these dialogues. She explained that she was drawn to this work because she recognized that "it was hard to feel responded to on campus when something happened around race." She recounted an experience where she found a swastika in the cafeteria and after reporting her concern about anti-Semitism to administrators, her concerns were met with responses including: "No, these people are smart, it's probably the Buddhist symbol," "No, these

people are smart so they're probably moral, so it definitely wasn't anything anti-Semitic.” She recalled that “that was a very common experience” on campus regarding race issues and came to believe that through the process of sustained dialogues “people were better able to address and learn about racism from each other’s experience and that through the dialogue process people could begin to transform their relationships and bring forth change within their communities thorough action”. Her work today remains very much focused on social issues including identity, race, and gender and working across those differences.

Sam

My third participant was Sam, an expert on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and civic and global education. Sam is a U.S. Fulbright Scholar and recipient of an Award for Distinguished Service to the field of Conflict Resolution. He has over 30 years of experience as an educational consultant, lawyer, mediator, college professor, trainer, senior program officer and manager, and author. Sam’s work includes supporting educators and professionals in developing institution-wide initiatives and student activities promoting civic engagement, peace, and conflict awareness. He works with groups and individuals in need of career and conflict coaching, mediation, and conflict engagement assistance and has consulted with nearly 200 colleges around the U.S. and has given over 500 talks on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and international education. He is the president of a non-profit center for peacebuilding and humanitarian education. In addition, Sam teaches graduate courses on reflective practice and conflict analysis and has written articles and books primarily focusing on the expansion of peace and conflict approaches in higher education, especially at the community college level.

As an attorney, mediator, conflict resolution educator, author, and president of a peacebuilding organization in the Washington D.C. metro area, Sam has predominately worked in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding for more than fifteen years now and in that time has conducted somewhere between 30 – 40 dialogue facilitations with various individuals, groups, and communities across a wide range of issues including potentially divisive or conflictual issues, particularly race.

Julia

Julia began her career in education as a museum educator where she worked to facilitate dialogue among adults who wanted to discuss often very difficult subjects pertaining to United States history as depicted through art. She now works as an educator in the field of diplomacy where she addresses basic questions about diplomacy including questions as to who engages in it and where, its process, goals, and outcomes. Additionally, in her role as a diplomatic educator, she engages individuals in the process of dialogue in order to provide learners with the opportunity to explore more deeply a broad range of international issues addressed through the diplomatic process. She works to establish educational and diplomatic outreach goals as well as plans curriculum for teachers and students. She has experience directing educational programs and has also developed programs and classroom curriculum. She notes that she works with a lot of classes including those at the secondary and college levels, as well as adult workplace learning classes. She notes that those classes are often comprised of different ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, sometimes economic backgrounds, and people who are new to the United States.

Sandra

Sandra works both as an assistant director of a university diversity education program and as the director of a dialogue program that engages students, residential communities, student staff, and faculty in dialogues across difference. Her work and research interests focus primarily on social justice, multiculturalism and identity formation as well as leadership development, social identity formation, and critical race theory. Her work is centered on supporting diversity education and programming. She noted that as an undergraduate student she had many opportunities to engage in different dialogue settings including interfaith dialogues, which “sparked her interest the most to be able to come into an environment where conflict is on the table and to be able to engage with it and wrestle, make meaning, and hopefully build some alliances and coalition afterwards”. She noted that from there she continued to “dabble in diversity education” and has been facilitating dialogues particularly around race and ethnicity for almost twelve years. She also credits her experience as “one of the only students of color at a predominately White institution” for sparking her interest in diversity education and dialogues pertaining to race and ethnicity.

Vicki

Vicki has been a professor and scholar-practitioner in the field of conflict resolution for more than twenty years. She co-founded an organization focused on conflict transformation, directs a center for peacemaking, and possesses substantial expertise in intermediary roles and coordination amongst intermediaries, evaluation of conflict resolution initiatives, and theories of change, indicators of change, and evaluation in conflict resolution practice. She has engaged long-term in conflict resolution across the

globe and focuses a great deal of her work and research on dialogue, facilitation, program design and implementation, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and reconciliation. She notes that she works in a variety of different conflict contexts internationally and specializes in engaging “official and unofficial” people from various sides of a conflict in an entirely unofficial and informal discussion of things that might help provide greater understanding and insights of the other that may assist in a subsequent, more formal peace process. Vicki shared that her interest in dialogue and conflict resolution stem from her early experiences traveling and engaging in various intercultural experiences as a teenager in high school.

Martin

Martin is an experienced mediator, trainer and consultant, possessing more than 35 years of experience working to resolve various conflicts, within the workplace, including conflicts related to race, ethnicity and gender, sexual orientation, sexual harassment, and religion. He is actively engaged in developing new approaches to addressing conflicts and “has often been called in as a consultant/mediator in ‘intractable’ disputes’. Martin possesses a PhD in Psychology and has designed and conducted training programs internationally in dispute resolution, sexual harassment, and multicultural conflict. He works both as a facilitator and coach, sometimes coaching people who are in disputes about how they can be more productive in their dialogues. Martin is also an author of many works and has contributed much on the topic of conflict resolution.

Participants’ Descriptions of Dialogue and its Process

Early in the interview process, study participants were each asked to describe

dialogue and its process to someone unfamiliar with it in their own words. The purpose of this question was twofold: (1) to understand how each participant described the nature of dialogue (2) and to compare their description to the description referenced within this study. The description of dialogue as referenced within this study is as follows:

A process of direct, face-to-face encounter” (Bohm, 1996, p. xi) among any number of people, not just two (p. 6) whereby human beings genuinely listen to each other (Saunders, 2011) in a conversation seeking mutual understanding (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 14).

The descriptions of dialogue provided by the participants were as follows:

- It is “a discussion process between people that involves an open exchange of questions, responses, ideas and information in order achieve an accurate, clear understanding of perspectives”. It is a process of “really listening to one another in order to try to understand where the other side is coming from”. (John)
- “Dialogue is any instance where somebody is listening deeply enough to be changed by what they learn.” (Lisa)
- Dialogue is a process of “reaching a level of understanding”. (Sam)
- It is about “being heard and understood” (Julia)
- Dialogue is the process of “coming together to learn, listen, and engage with each other”. (Sandra)
- “Dialogue is a different kind of discourse. Its key difference is that it is oriented towards enhancing understanding rather than winning an argument or communicating facts.” (Martin)
- “The process of dialogue involves setting up an expectation of listening and a

tone of discussion with the focus on understanding each other rather than debating each other”. (Vicki)

After each participant provided her/his description of dialogue, each was shown the definition of dialogue used within this study. Each participant agreed with the definition of dialogue used within this study and approved of the description as an accurate definition of dialogue. These are some of the responses the participants had after reading the definition of dialogue used within this study.

- “Yeah, I think that's good. I mean, it's a very open ended definition right? The objective is mutual understanding, two or more people. Yes. I think that's a good definition. I think if you add anything more to it, then it becomes more restrictive. I think the objective in dialogue is mutual understanding more than anything else, so it's not trying to resolve a conflict or trying to set sort of objective beyond that, so I think it works well the way you have it.” (Sam)
- “Yes, I agree with that.” (Julia)
- “I like it. It includes both Bohm (1996) and Sanders (2011), but I am not sure how long this definition will survive in today’s world” with the face-to-face encounter part... “Probably always, because most practitioners will tell you, like I would, don't try it not face-to-face.” (Lisa)
- “That's pretty spot on.” (Sandra)
- “Yeah. That looks great. You're drawing from three different people to put together a good description. Yeah, very nice. I think, it's implicit in here, but the distinction between this is not debating. That it's genuinely listening to each other, seeking mutual understanding, and that then inherently that means not a

debate.” (Vicki)

- “Yes, I am perfectly comfortable with that description.” (Martin)
- “Yes, however, I don’t believe a dialogue is limited to face-to-face encounters.”
(John)

Research Question One: Themes

The focus of the first research question was on identifying those factors experienced educators engaged in the work of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process. Specifically, research question one asked: *What factors do experienced educators engaged in the work of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process?*

Understanding the Dialogue Process

Most of the participants noted that before engaging in the dialogue process they often begin by acquainting participants with an understanding of the nature and process of dialogue. Lisa stated that,

[The nature and process of dialogue] is the first thing we teach because most people are unaware of dialogue as a framework for communication. I explain that dialogue, as opposed to debate, is especially useful when feelings are involved or relationships are central. It involves asking key questions, and asking them in a way that opens others up rather than asserts a point of view.

Vicki noted that by introducing individuals to the nature and process of dialogue, “people come knowing what to expect and they come with a mindset of readiness to engage that way”. For Vicki, an educator who works in the field of conflict resolution, she believes it

is important for her to highlight that,

There are different emphases in that the emphasis in dialogue is on let's build understanding and then, yes, we want to start looking at next steps together too. Whereas in negotiation there is an assumption of we're going to make a decision about these concrete issues; we want to get our way as opposed to really understanding.

Sandra noted that “dialogue is distinct in that it’s not a debate”. She explains that she spends a lot of time saying that,

We use dialogue for everything. Let's come have a dialogue, which, will actually be a panel discussion where the panelists are talking. You might ask them a question, but I'm not sharing my personal narrative after sharing that question. The panelists don't have an opportunity to ask me questions. There's a certain level of power dynamics in the room where someone has positional authority and they're determining how people show up, rather than the group having ownership together of what are our agreements, what are our norms, what are the rules and community norms that we want to operate by. I think one of the things that make dialogue unique is that you actually don't engage in dialogue without building a level of trust and understanding first. Knowing that that's almost sometimes the hardest part that I have to get to know you and to know you well enough when we are engaging with a particular topic. I kind of have an understanding of where you're coming from. A lot of times we don't want to know where someone's coming from, we just want to get our point across. There's a level of humanizing the dialogue that I don't know that discussion and

debate really allows to happen as much.

Sam noted that,

The first thing I think is important in establishing a dialogue is to get everybody in the room to understand that we are here to do a certain level of sharing that raises understanding. We are not here to debate something, for instance.

For Sam, he felt that explaining the dialogue process was important because he “thinks a lot of people get into conversations with the expectation that I’m here to change your mind rather than I’m here to try to understand”. He highlights that if you set out with the understanding that dialogue is about trying to understand each other then it is more manageable for people with differences of opinion to talk across those differences. He stated,

Let me illustrate how significant that can be sometimes. I probably told you I visited a community college in Ferguson, Missouri after the riots and violence there in August of 2013. I remember having a conversation with an African American man in an African American group where they were talking to me about police brutality. They were talking about it in very stark terms and I’d never had that conversation with somebody. My understanding of police brutality was based on what I read in the Washington Post. I had Black friends but we didn’t talk about police brutality. That level of insight and understanding was really powerful for me. I wasn’t there to be convinced they were right or they were wrong even though I believed what they were saying. I was there just to gain a really intimate insight as to what their experiences were about, that’s what dialogue is about, is to get that.

Several of the participants noted that often the people with whom they work initially possess little understanding of the dialogue process and that they must generally differentiate between dialogue, debate, negotiation, and discussion before engaging participants in the dialogue process. Many indicated that although the word dialogue is frequently used within society and in the media, the understanding of dialogue as a distinct form of communication, differing from other forms of communication including discussion, debate, negotiation, or even conversation is often unknown by would-be interlocutors who often are unfamiliar with the notion that dialogue lies at the opposite end of the communication spectrum from debate. From the interviews, I created the following graphic to depict how participants described how they view dialogue and its focus as distinctly different from other forms of communication in order to assist the reader.

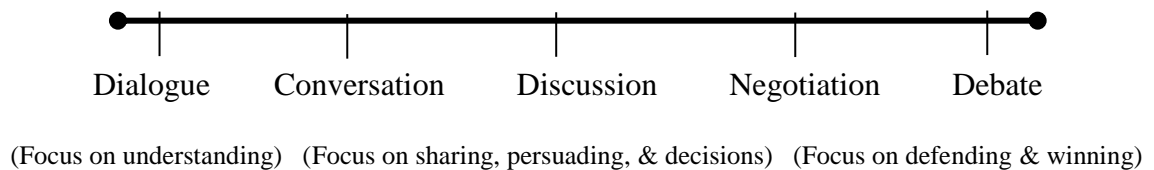


Figure 1 Communication Spectrum

Challenges

Sam, like several of the other study participants, asserted that they have witnessed that the vast majority of people they have worked with are far more experienced with or even educated in the practice and process of debate rather than dialogue and that the initial challenge for them is familiarizing would be interlocutors with the process and skills of dialogue rather than those associated with debate. Sam shared that,

I think that one of the real challenges with dialogue today, is that we live in a very confrontational, debate society. If you get people together, and by their nature

they're different in their views, then it becomes something that becomes very confrontational. I think it's a real challenge for people within a dialogue to make sure that people understand that this [debate] is not what we're here for. I think that that's one of the major problems. I think when people are given the opportunity to have a conversation or a dialogue I think people don't necessarily understand the objectives are to reach some sort of understanding. They think of it as an opportunity to raise grievances in often a very confrontational way.

He reflected on the critical incident document he submitted to me and explained that in this incident, he was facilitating a series of meetings between a subsidized housing area in the city and the local management of the program. He reflected that he felt there was little understanding of the process by the community and thought that most felt it was designed as a grievance rather than a process to rebuild the residents' council. He admitted that upon looking back at that situation he may not have set appropriate expectations for the group about the nature and purpose of dialogue.

Martin stated in order to overcome this challenge he contrasts the purposes of the two [debate and dialogue] stating that one [debate] is oriented towards winning an argument while the other [dialogue] is oriented towards enhancing understanding. Noting that "that's the key difference; they have a different purpose; it's a different kind of discourse." Additionally, Martin noted that he prepares the group to engage in dialogue by both "discussing the goal of dialogue" and discussing "why the group is engaging in dialogue" as part of his prep work. He further explained that he informs individuals interested in engaging in dialogue that "dialogue requires a willingness to listen to and respect others' points of views and experiences, as well as a willingness to

open oneself to new ideas and the possibility of actually creating new understanding”.

Like Martin, Sandra also describes what it means to engage in dialogue because as she has frequently experienced, individuals “get in there and they're like, I want to debate, day one, ready to go.” She noted “there's a familiarity with having to debate or be persuasive in some kind of way so, there's quite a bit of pre-reading that we'll do [about dialogue]”. She shares,

Upon the first meeting the group discusses dialogue and we usually go into a pretty good discussion about how do you define, (A) discussion, (B) debate, and (C) dialogue so that the group can come to an understanding of how those things are different and the value of each of them as well as why we're doing this one in this space.

For most of the participants, orienting for dialogue is an important first step in preparing to facilitate a dialogue and aids in overcoming the challenge of individuals coming into the process prepared to debate rather than dialogue. It was noted frequently throughout the various interviews that few, if any, participants come to the dialogue process understanding what dialogue or its processes entail, so facilitators must ensure that participants are familiarized with both the nature and process of dialogue before beginning the dialogue process.

Developing Dialogue Skills

Additionally, many noted that they discuss with the individuals desiring to enter into a dialogue four very important skills necessary to effective engagement in the dialogue process. These skills include: listening to understand what the other is saying, asking questions in order to try and gain a greater understanding of what the other is

saying or has experienced, suspending judgment, and a willingness to participate and speak openly. Vicki stated that for her, listening to understand was the “most important part of the dialogue process”. Martin asserted that,

I think most people are able to actively listen if they are afforded the opportunity; however, if you look at how people get trained in [for example] law school, it's about making certain kinds of arguments. It's not about being present and understanding the other for the sheer sake of understanding.

He continued by adding,

If educators want to teach people about dialogue, its process, and skills, they might begin by setting up occasions where people have the opportunity to be in dialogue and present them with some of the fundamental orientations of dialogue including the idea of active listening.

All the study participants also indicated that listening or “active listening” requires an individual to deliberately choose to listen and hear what another is saying rather than judging what is said or preparing a response to what is being stated. John notes that,

Listening is not a disciplined skill most of us choose to develop and practice. We naturally interpret and draw conclusions as we listen, oftentimes jumping to conclusions before we've taken the time to fully and accurately understand the speaker. Listening includes a dedicated effort to practice consideration, respect and civility toward another. It involves valuing and respecting another person and their views – even when we disagree with them. By listening to another, you communicate to the other person that they are valued.

Another important skill highlighted during the course of this research study is that of suspending judgement and assumptions. Doing so allows individuals to not only hear another's point of view, but through the process of sharing and asking questions, allows for reflection of previously held views and the option of adjusting previously held views. As noted by John,

So often, people are swift to judge and condemn those who hold opposing world views without bothering to fully understand these views. Many times, it's convenient to simplify issues by seeing them in black and white terms, without taking time to understand the varying shades of gray that color most important issues. There are reasons why people think and act the way they do, and it's important to take time to understand - even when we disagree with those reasons. Dialogue helps us understand people in context and see the issue from their perspective. It can help us see areas of agreement that we may not have initially seen.

Vicki commented that in a dialogue "we've got our different perspectives" so there must be "a willingness to step back and put them up for examination". To achieve this, she regularly has her groups "write things on a flip chart or list up on a board a bunch of the issues that have come up in the dialogue in order to step back and look at them". She asserts that it is,

The container of dialogue that allows us to shift our focus of attention from I know what I know and I know I'm right to isn't this interesting, look at all these different perspectives that are interweaving and overlapping and diverging. Let's look at how they're similar and different, let's look at what are areas of overlap

and common concern, what are areas of difference. It turns it into a genuine curiosity and investigation of let's try to understand this and then we turn into a joint curiosity where we need each other to understand this better because I can't understand what you're thinking and you can't understand what I'm thinking but together we can help each other understand what is this whole complex puzzle of different perspectives created by our different areas that we're coming from.

Additionally, by suspending judgement, individuals in the group are less likely to “attack” another or their ideas and are more likely to be able to employ another important dialogue skill: respecting others.

Throughout the interview process participants noted that dialoguing with others does not mean you have to agree with someone, simply that you afford them the space and courtesy to hear what they have to say when sharing their perspective. In a dialogue study participants reported that interlocutors need to recognize that it is okay not to agree, that you can disagree respectfully, and we don't have to agree with people to learn from them. Study participants continuously indicated that the process of dialogue excludes personal attacks or judgements and necessitates respect for others. John explained that it is important to communicate with others in a “non-defensive way” so that parties are better able to effectively communicate their thoughts and feelings and keeps others listening and engaging instead of shutting down because they feel attacked or that someone is pointing a finger of blame at them.

For Lisa she highlights this theme in her critical incident reflection memo which referenced a topic that arose during the course of a dialogue about how some university faculty believe that many faculty are not as inclusive or skilled around conversations

about race. Lisa shared that,

“This [incident] happened in a dialogue circle composed of faculty members and graduate students where the topic on the table was how faculty could respond to the fact that many don’t see the faculty as inclusive or skilled around conversations about race. One white faculty member, in response to a comment by someone about how they think carefully about the syllabus they create each semester, said, in an honest, earnest way, “I have to admit I never think about the race of who is writing and I need to more and I’ve only just realized that.” A white male faculty member agreed and expressed shame and a similar experience. Just after that a Black faculty member said, “You see, I never would teach and not think about that.” A queer white woman followed and said, “I think it’s really important to look at who is writing what.

Lisa believed that this dialogue was one of the most difficult dialogues for her to facilitate for many reasons including the fact that even after “the white faculty members shared that they appreciated people telling them directly that they needed to be more thoughtful about their syllabi,” some within the dialogue continued to want to “go on the attack” and try to “shame” the others in the group for sharing about their lack of awareness or thought to issues of race and/or identity when selecting texts or materials for course syllabi. She noted that repeated personal attacks and shaming caused many faculty to disengage from the process and remain silent for the remainder of the dialogue. Upon reflection, Lisa stated she would have come back and asked “the black and queer women to explain what’s most important for them in why white professors should think about race” so that they would have had the space to get what they wanted to say out

through the use of “I” statements rather than having them “attack and attempt to shame” the other faculty.

Another important dialogue skill identified by study participants was the ability to ask appropriate, open-ended, and responsive questions. John stated that, “Rather than presume on another person’s thoughts, dialogue causes us to take an inductive approach and ask questions, and process information until understanding is achieved.” By asking questions, interlocutors are able to confirm that they are actually listening as well as prod for more information to enhance understanding. Study participants noted that using open-ended questions assists in enhancing understanding of others’ perspectives and allows individuals to probe further into the perspectives and experiences of other in genuine curiosity.

Finally, study participants indicated that interlocutors need to possess a willingness to participate and share in the dialogue process. Several study participants remarked that it is vital to the dialogue process that participants in a dialogue willingly participate and honestly share their own unique experiences, perspectives, and thoughts in order to increase understanding. It is through participation and sharing that differences among interlocutors might be revealed and perspectives, beliefs, and values explored.

Creating a Conducive Environment

While asking participants about the factors they perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process, the majority noted that it is important to begin by establishing what some referred to as ground rules, while others referred to agreements, guidelines, conditions for success, community and/or group norms in an effort to create a safe environment. Vicki noted that,

The process of dialogue involves setting up an expectation of listening and a tone of discussion with the focus on understanding each other rather than debating each other, and setting up ground rules and guidelines for the engagement that's geared towards understanding and geared away from debate, and setting up another way of talking.

Sandra stated,

In the first meeting it is important to create something like community norms or conditions for success. This is what allows people to know how to show up [to engage in dialogue]. This is how you cue your participants in what is normal for us or what do we do. Where I push them probably the most is on what happens when they are violated. [I ask] What do we want to do? Do we want to ask a follow-up question? Are we okay with someone leaving the room? Are we okay with talking to the person next to you, saying, this is what just happened. I wanted to bring this to your attention. Are we okay doing that in front of the group? The group comes to a consensus. At the end everyone signs a document and we revisit it at the beginning of every session. Is there anything we want to do? Anything we want to add? Take away? How do we feel like we're doing with these community norms? Which ones are we strongest in? Which ones do we need to improve upon? We start off every meeting with that.

Sam noted,

The facilitator may spend a little bit of time having the parties think about rules ... Some people will say, "Here are the rules." I don't do that necessarily. I would say, how should we treat one another? In the process, the facilitator comes to a

consensus with the parties as to, there's no name calling, we call each other by our first name, we don't interrupt each other, those kind of things.

Most participants noted that in order to create a space for dialogue where people feel that they can be heard and understood, they turn to the group to help establish the ground rules. Individuals are asked what they think is needed to create such an environment as well as what sort of behaviors they would like to see. By including the group in the establishment of the ground rules, individuals begin to establish trust. Sam shared that,

Often I think facilitators lose the opportunity to build trust through the development of the process and the facilitation. The process of setting up the facilitation would be in of itself a trust building process. If a facilitator comes in and he says, "Here are my 10 rules; this is what you're going to do, he's lost a great opportunity to get the people to really start working with each other. Having said that, sometimes you have to come in with your 10 rules because sometimes, because of time or circumstances, you just don't have the ability to sit down with the parties and help them come to it. That is not my preference, I'd rather sit down and have people work together to establish ground rules.

Additionally he notes that,

Building a level of trust is really important. I would say sometimes you can't build it to the extent that you want. There's a degree of trust for certain things and there's a higher degree for other things and there's an even higher degree for other things. If what you're talking about are things that are not deeply held emotions but kind of ... You're talking about things that happen in the

community that are kind of public knowledge that everybody knows about, then the level of trust probably doesn't have to be as big. However, if what you're talking about maybe about somebody's sexual identity for instance, that person's sexual identity is now being revealed through this process and they're concerned about their sexual identity, you're going to have to have a much higher level of trust. The trust has to match what's going on.

Vicki explained that,

Dialogues tend to go through phases. They go through phases of perhaps not trusting, not believing the other person, but they listen anyway; towards deeper understanding and more openness. They can go through phases of feeling as though there is still a lack of trust, maybe a sense of a lack of safety so people may be careful about what they share in an early part of the dialogue. Then there tends to be a shift of, okay, they feel like trust has been established and a decision to share openly is made.

As noted by the participants of this study, few people come to the dialogue process possessing any knowledge about what engaging in dialogue entails, therefore, “setting norms, guidelines, or ground rules for dialogue helps prepare participants for this unique experience” Schirch & Campt, 2007, p. 37). Setting norms not only introduces participants to the nature of dialogue, it helps build trust among the group because they work together, as equals, to create the conditions of the dialogue. This step also assists in creating a space where people know what to expect and helps them to feel “safe” to openly share their thoughts with the group.

Safe Space and Brave Space

Throughout the course of the interviews the term safe space or the need to create an atmosphere of safety repeatedly arose. Each participant spoke to the concept of a safe space and its importance in the dialogue process. For example, Sam stated that

I think part of a safe space is building a climate of trust and I think building a climate of trust is not automatic. A lot of it will have to do with how they view me and how they view each other so I think a facilitator has to take it for what it is. A facilitator has to be cautious about whether people feel safe in the environment. I will state that this is what I'm here to do for the next couple of days, let's talk about how we're going to do this. How should we treat each other, what should be the understanding?

Martin noted that,

You have to create an environment to which people are comfortable that they're not going to be punished, ridiculed, or isolated because they're talking. You talk about the fact that you want conditions in which people are going to feel free to raise the things that are of concern to them and feel free to be treated with respect and all of those kinds of things. It's not a hard thing to talk about because most people going into a dialogue share that concern.

John adds that it is “important to create a space where each person feels safe discussing the issues from their perspective”.

However, three of the research participants differed in their viewpoints pertaining to the notion of a “safe” space, including John, who noted that he is less concerned with safety at times. He stated that, “in counseling, sometimes things have to get worse before

they get better. Certainly I want people to feel comfortable, that they can trust me; that my agenda is I'm really for the relationship.” However, he explained that sometimes when entering into honest dialogues over difficult or painful subjects he informs participants that “It's going to be hard. It's going to be embarrassing. It's going to be painful. There's no way of getting around that”. He believes that agreeing to engage in a difficult dialogue, without recognizing that there may be discomfort or even emotional pain is “like saying, I want to go to the dentist, but I don't want to feel any pain.” Still, he does share that his counseling approach does “attempt to create a space where each person feels safe discussing the issues from their perspective”.

Lisa asserts that “dialogue is not a safe space” and that “we don’t train on safe spaces, but instead on “this is an active space. We are going to engage in tough topics. We say that people are just people and they’re trying to follow the group norms and that’s it.” Lisa explains through example why she believes dialogue is not a safe space. She recalled being in a classroom where,

People were just telling me what they thought of poor people and telling me what they thought about black people. I just had to hear it. I remember the faculty member even saying, I don't know why the black women never speak up here. My thoughts were because we're getting hit with shrapnel and direct fire frequently from these loud white guys who were excited to talk to somebody and tell what they think about them. It was very commonplace to feel like it was not a safe space.

For Sandra, she explains that a “safe space is an illusion; there are many risks”. For her participants she makes sure that they are

Going in knowing that there is a risk that your feelings will get hurt, or something will be said. You may say something and you will be challenged or held accountable in a way that you are unfamiliar with, that you might associate with a personal attack or being triggered in some way.

She recounted an incident where an individual engaged in a dialogue pertaining to reparations was angry because,

He felt that he was being made to feel guilty for having ancestors who owned slaves in Maryland. We were talking about whether reparations should exist or not, and if so, what kind. He felt that, no, they shouldn't, because why should someone else be benefiting from what's happened in the past when he doesn't feel like he should have to pay for what happened in the past; that that didn't connect to his life at all at this point. There was a student who said, "Actually, there's something called generational wealth." He did not like that response. That's when he said, "I feel like I'm being attacked and being made to feel guilty for having ancestors who owned slaves."

Sandra noted that this individual was very angry and ultimately went to his father, a congressman, who called her to sternly inquire about what she was teaching. She shared that this occurrence is not that unusual given the environment where she facilitates dialogues as she occasionally has individuals who will say "I'm really uncomfortable [or angry] and I can't wait to report this to my father who is the, X, Y, Z, diplomat, administrator, or congressman." She adds that "that's been a unique challenge for me here. It's a very different environment in that way." When asked how she handles these situations she noted that she ensures that she is able to clearly address the concern,

explain what and how she engages participants in a dialogue group, highlight that their participation was voluntary, and why they engage in these types of dialogues at their institution. This approach, she states, generally helps alleviate any further concern. She concluded by sharing that although the individual was angry because he perceived he was being attacked,

The next meeting, thankfully, the individual returned and the group was able to hear each other out. I asked the group to think about what their thoughts were about what had transpired the week before and how they felt about it. I said, just bringing it back to our community expectations, how did you all feel about that conversation? Space was created where people were able to work it through with each other, being able to talk about it and enough room to say, I can kind of hear where he's coming from and this is why. Thankfully the group was able to hear each other out. There had been enough trust in that. I never heard from the congressman again.

Julia, Lisa, and Sandra all expressed that participants in dialogue have to be brave, brave enough to hear others' points of view, even if it is hard, even painful to hear. In fact, Julia notes that she prepares individuals to engage in dialogue by informing them that they will need to "be comfortable with the uncomfortable; to hear what people's experiences are." Sandra explains that "there's growth in discomfort, a need to lean into the discomfort and create a brave space." For these participants, they preferred to describe engagement in a dialogue as a brave space rather than a safe space because they assert that engaging in dialogue and sharing personal experiences or points of view means that you are opening yourself up to being vulnerable and taking risks by sharing

your “truths” with others. They assert that this emotional vulnerability requires interlocutors to enter into a “brave space” since emotional safety cannot be guaranteed, thereby, invalidating the concept of a “safe space.” Facilitators cannot prevent someone from feeling hurt, shame, and/or guilt.

Facilitator Role, Knowledge, and Skills

Study participants reported that dialogue facilitators serve as guides for the discussion, maintain neutrality, assist with asking open-ended questions, and ensure ground rules are observed. The majority remarked that it is the role of the facilitator to propose and/or elicit the establishment and agreement on ground rules or community norms in order to promote an atmosphere of safety and enhance the respectful exchange of ideas and experiences in the dialogue process. They also added that facilitators are responsible for identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, bringing in all points of view, and create spaces and opportunities for everyone to participate. They provide a place for people to talk and makes sure that it is clear to interlocutors that they [the facilitator] values everybody's contribution. Sam noted that,

Dialogue is best when it's facilitated. When there's a third party who can come in and, not unlike mediation, set up an expectation, provide a safe space for people to converse, allow people to raise what they want to raise in a non-confrontational way, and clarify points between the parties. Often the facilitator has to go through a process of reframing it for the other party. [For example], I could say something to you in a very sharp and very mean sounding way, but the dialogue facilitator is going to take it and sanitize it a bit so that the other person can understand it in a different way.

Martin shared that “as a facilitator you set up the expectation, help participants learn to better frame the points they are making, and explain the concept of active listening so interlocutors are better to listen to understand rather than simply rebut what was stated. He added,

There's got to be I think in the beginning some understanding that we are here to do this. We are not here to do that. If people are not here to do this [dialogue], and they want to do that [debate], then maybe dialogue isn't what we're doing.

For Julia, she sees the role of the facilitator as helping individuals be heard and understood. She explains that this is achieved by:

making sure those ground rules are stuck to, that people speak one at a time, and if I'm hearing just debate about ideology; if they're just debating each other about who's right and who's wrong, or why I'm right and why you're wrong, if it starts to just go into the direction of debate, I bring them back to dialogue.

As a facilitator, John suggests that “you're trying to get them talking so you're trying to ask open ended questions, or ideally let the group talk. Throw a question out, and then let the group go back and forth popcorn style”. He also notes that as a facilitator he must continually discipline himself “to listen, rather than interject and facilitate rather than pontificate”.

Lisa shared that,

A lot of our training on facilitation is about building that temperament and the patience and the curiosity [in the facilitator] about finding out what makes somebody say that rather than slipping into the old patterns of feeling that that person's wrong and I need to shut it [their comments] down or that person is not

displaying a social justice lean that is important and that I find to be morally superior, I need to correct them. Dialogue facilitations are about trying to get out what people think here and now; it's not prescriptive.

Sandra highlights that facilitators would benefit by being familiar with conflict, even if not necessarily comfortable with it, so that they are able to continue without shutting down. She explains that the benefit of being familiar with conflict means that the facilitator would still be able to continue to listen, maintain eye contact, manage the room, pay attention to people's verbal and non-verbal reactions, in essence, remain poised if or when conflict arises. Sandra notes that she prepares individuals to engage in dialogue by informing them that

The heart of dialogue, particularly intergroup dialogue, is conflict. That can be conflict within, conflict between, and conflict in society. We put it on the table. We name that. It already exists. Our goal is to try to navigate that conflict in a way that society doesn't want us to, in a way that society thrives over us separating or operating in silos where if we're actually able to learn how to create compassion and empathy and engage across different sets, actually how we're directly effecting or interacting with the conflict. That's usually where I start with them. If systems of oppression had their way, none of us would interact. That's how they become stronger. I try to come at it from a more positive lens to say, these conflicts already exist and we happen to just be players in a game we didn't create. How do we take ownership and try and combat these systems, or dismantle them?

For the study participants, the role of the facilitator is to guide individuals through

the dialogue process. Facilitators are responsible for ensuring participants understand the dialogue process and ensure that the group creates community norms or ground rules before engaging in the process. They are also responsible for ensuring ground rules are adhered to throughout the process and that the dialogue remains focused and does not devolve into debate. They serve also to ensure that each participant has an opportunity to be heard and try to ensure that they model for participants active listening and respect.

Participant Role, Knowledge, and Skills

The participants in this study did not expect individuals who agree to engage in the dialogue process to come to the process with any prior dialogue knowledge or skills. Individuals who desire to enter into a dialogue are simply expected to come with the desire to listen deeply in order to understand. Sam stated, “what you should expect from parties that come into a process is a respect for whatever the rules are that have been created by the group, a respect for confidentiality, and a level of voluntariness”. Lisa notes that for her participants, all they need to do is:

Learn what dialogue is; follow the group norms, that’s it literally. They don’t have to be good at this. They just have to be themselves and bring their experiences to the table. This is it. As a participant, they pledge to have the courage to engage in topics that are not frequently discussed within diverse groups, attend all meetings, commit to the dialogue, share perspectives and experiences openly, actively listen to others, create and follow group norms, understand the process and its goals, and offer feedback to the facilitator(s) about making the dialogue open, inclusive and productive.

Martin notes that “it’s important in dialogue for people to adapt in orientation of genuine

curiosity about another person's position and interest in understanding it asking open-ended questions in the hopes of learning more. Sandra remarked that participants should possess "a level of humility" as well as the "ability to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Vicki added that interlocutors in a dialogue need to be "open to listening and learning". She explains that when participants are listening deeply, 'they're not thinking about their grocery list or what they're going to do next when they've finished with that meeting. They're not thinking of how they're going to respond to what someone just said.'" Each participant noted that participants simply need to be open and willing to engage in the dialogue process and adhere to the ground rules that they, the participants, will be included in creating. It is the facilitator who must come to the process knowing what dialogue is, how to facilitate the process, and how to educate the group on the nature and process of dialogue.

Research Question Two: Themes

Understanding how these educators manage emotions, their own and that of others, while involved within a dialogue pertaining to conflictual content and diverse perspectives, was the focus of the second research question. Specifically, research question two asked: *How do these educators while involved within a dialogue pertaining to conflictual content and diverse perspectives manage emotions, their own and those of others, when they emerge?*

Emotions Are Important in the Dialogue Process

For each participant in this study, recognizing and acknowledging emotions was an important aspect in facilitating constructive dialogues. All the participants of this study noted that it was important to provide a space for emotions and most noted that it is important to make sure ground rules or community norms are set at the beginning of the

dialogue process so that participants within a dialogue are aware of the pre-established guidelines set by the group before emotions arise.

Vicki points out that it is important to “acknowledge the feelings of the other person” and Lisa noted that “emotions do matter” and are “a part of the conversation just like words”. She adds that her job as a facilitator is to ask questions like, “I noticed you seem to be emotional or you said you’re frustrated about that and you’re expressing it. Can you tell us where that emotion comes from or what’s behind that?” Sandra stated that “people engaged in dialogues need to articulate both thoughts AND feelings throughout the dialogue process” and Sam shared that,

I do believe part of dialogue is people venting and talking about their anxieties and their fears. Even though I do set rules and expectations, that doesn’t mean people can’t get angry; it can get heated, they can get mad, and they can get mad at the other person. [As a facilitator] I would say you can’t call them a name, you can’t interrupt them, but I’m not going to say you can’t get emotional about it.

John notes that “Being angry is not necessarily wrong. It’s trying to understand why you’re angry, and being able to appropriately express that” that is important. Vicki added that,

I think there’s a sense of, when I see tensions rising, I tend to try to take a temperature and make a choice. Is this something that needs to be named and focused on and given an opportunity for us to learn from it? Or is this something that look, let’s have a coffee break. Let me explore it over a one-on-one conversation. Let’s call for the ten-minute break and then we’ll come back to it with a new energy. There’s different ways to focus in on something and really

bring it to a head for a discussion or acknowledge, yeah, that's going to be a sticky thing. What if we put that in the agenda for tomorrow, because we really want to get through these other issues today? There's ways of addressing raising tensions, depending on what I think the group can handle.

She illustrated this by sharing a situation that arose for her:

I remember doing that once when I felt that one of the individuals in the group was really going to lose it, like tears were welling up and not quite going down the face yet, but it just really looked like the emotion was going to boil over in a way that it looked like she was feeling really embarrassed about it. It worked then, to give her time to actually cry in private and then come back and be honest about it and share that “this brought me to tears because this is so important to me in this way.” She was able to talk about it constructively.

Vicki added that she wouldn't have wanted to just squash the emotion and pretend it wasn't there, instead she prefers to let someone come to terms with it and be able to come back in the room and be open about it [their emotions].

Martin explained that,

There are a lot of different things you can do. For one, you may try to restate the very point that the person said in anger in a less angry way and trying a less charged way to say it. You may modulate your tone of voice, if someone's very agitated, you may intentionally slow down the pace at which you're speaking, modeling a different kind of behavior. If it's having a negative impact you may check on the other person about how their responding to that. You will find out what's underneath, what is it about the situation that's being discussed that the

person is so angry about. What's been the impact on them, why are they feeling that way, because sometimes it's something that can actually be addressed. You generally avoid lecturing people about what's nice and what's not nice; that's not an effective technique.

In chapter 1 of this dissertation an example was provided where difficult emotions arose in the learning environment when an Iraqi student became upset with another student because the other was an American soldier who had served in Iraq. Vicki shared how she might have handled that situation in the learning environment:

Yeah, so if I've got an Iraqi student and a U.S. military student who are arguing about what was right or wrong to do in Iraq, I think I would say, this is a great opportunity that we've got you both here. I think it's really good for all of us to hear both perspectives and be able to learn from both of you. It is great that we're not getting just a one-sided presentation here and to try and value both of them. However, if the issue or topic was not related to the course material, I might say, this class is not the place to settle this discussion. Hopefully both of you will continue on with your studies and do more work in this area and be able to come up with more nuanced arguments, and hopefully, you'll learn from each other as you do so and that your conversations with each other will help you each investigate this further and come to more nuanced arguments. I think it's a good idea to encourage them to look at each other as opportunities to learn in a safe environment from someone who has a very, very, very, different perspective.

Sam explained that,

You allow them the emotion, you give them the space to have their emotion, and

you just kind of make sure that they adhere to the ground rules that are initially set when those emotions do arise. I might acknowledge in the facilitation, I can see this is very upsetting to you and you're very emotional or so forth. That's very reaffirming language. If the individual remains very upset or emotional, I might say, let's take a break now. If they wanted to have a conversation then I would have the conversation with them on the break. I think in nine out of ten times when you come back, it's different. Additionally, I've given [the individual] a way to leave the process without doing it in an embarrassing way.

The research showed that emotions are indeed an important part of the dialogue process, particularly conflict laden topics, as people are engaged in the process of sharing and learning from others thoughts and ideas that are meaningful to them and might challenge their strongly held beliefs or reveal personal pain. It was clear from the participants, that the role of the facilitator played an important part in managing emotions and required them to ensure ground rules were established and adhered to as well as facilitator skill in allowing space for emotions when needed and/or recognizing a need to stop the dialogue in order for the group to take a break when necessary. It was also revealed that as an educator, who may not wish to facilitate a dialogue in the class, it is okay to address the emotion involving a difficult topic that might arise and state that the class may not be the appropriate forum to discuss the topic and that alternative places and/or opportunities might exist elsewhere.

Owning One's Emotions

John asserts that "emotions are like toxic chemicals. If you bury them in the ground, they don't go away. They have to be dredged up and processed, you know?"

For him, he noted that while facilitating dialogues, he encourages individuals to share their story and tries “to help people own their emotions, by using “I” statements.” John’s critical incident reflection highlights how emotions ran high among a married couple on the brink of divorce who he engaged in dialogue with one another. He noted that,

Attempts at dialogue during our counseling sessions usually were subverted by insults, hostility, selfishness and defensiveness. Both individuals grew up in homes broken by divorce and verbal abuse. Oftentimes, I had to stop one spouse from interrupting or correcting the other as they shared, reminding them of the value of listening as a way to show respect and value – even if they disagreed with their spouse. I also tried to help each spouse learn to use “I” statements as a way to articulate and own their own emotions rather than blaming. I would then have the other spouse “reflect” back what they had heard and ask questions to clarify and correct their understanding for better accuracy.

The use of “I” statements was also mentioned by many of the participants interviewed. Study participants noted that by using “I” statements, it was easier for people within a dialogue to communicate in a non-defensive way, thereby, enabling better listening and understanding of the other. It was noted that the use of “I” statements is a way of communicating with others that requires the speaker to take responsibility for their beliefs, views, and/or feelings rather than placing blame, judgement, attacks, or negative attributes onto others, particularly the listener. For Lisa, she noted that an important group norm was to “steer clear of generalizations and instead the preference is for the use of I-statements and experiences over opinion.” As a facilitator, she notes that whatever the issue or topic, she ensures that she assists the speaker with moving away

from generalizations and towards expressing their personal narrative by saying “Tell me more about what makes you say that or tell me about the experiences behind that.” She illustrates this point as follows:

Say I walk into a dialogue group and all I’m saying is, yeah, Black people aren’t respected here and faculty just needs to rise up. As the facilitator I might inquire, tell me what makes you say this. What makes you so passionate? What makes you share that? How is this interacted in your life? At that point they might say, yeah, I’ve been dismissed by every faculty member who I talked to about what it feels like to be Black in the classroom. Then we can talk about that. We can do something with that. The empathies, the urgencies, but until then, until it moves from opinion and generalization to something more like a personal narrative, even if it’s anecdotal, then a facilitator can really go, okay, now we’re talking. As facilitators we are trained to listen and say, are we in a pile of opinion and generalization or are we learning about this person’s particular and unique experience?

Julia also used a similar example when she described a dialogue where several Hispanic students were angry at White people and stated that they didn’t like White people because they “see their White privilege.” Initially they spoke with “that broad, we don’t like White people; they get all the advantages kind of thing.” Julia noted that, “I think with that kind of thing, it was important as the facilitator to have the students take ownership of their feelings and use “I” statements and share personal experiences and observations, rather than generalization.” She also noted that it has been helpful for her “to ask them questions about how they can be involved in their own corner of the world

and make change; and to look at creating change; what does that look like.”

An important part of managing emotions and ensuring a “safe” space while facilitating dialogues was ensuring that participants used “I” statements when sharing their thoughts and feelings with the group. The participants in this study certainly believe that emotions are important part of the process, but it was clear that how one expressed their emotions was vital to ensuring the process was constructive rather than destructive. As noted by many of the participants, people are more inclined to listen when individuals share their perspectives through the use of “I” statements or personal narratives rather than generalizations.

Facilitator Experiences with Emotion

During the course of facilitating dialogues, particularly those dealing with sometimes difficult topics, many of the facilitators in this study noted that they themselves occasionally experience challenging, sometimes painful emotions. It was noted that facilitators should be able to manage their emotions in the moment and listen enough to remain engaged. Sandra noted that it was important to recognize that,

If you are really that emotionally charged, it's not the time [to engage in dialogue]. If you can't engage in the conversation from a place of empathy and compassion, if you can't engage with a person with a different perspective at that point, then no, it's not the time. If you're going to approach this and create more damage then you're not doing this in accordance to what dialogue was established to be.

Sandra also remarked that facilitators need to remain mindful that occasionally some “people are looking for someone in the room to displace their anger, their frustration, or

discomfort upon" including the facilitator. She shared an incident when

I was facilitating a dialogue with faculty and staff during a week-long colloquium.

I was the only facilitator in a room of 60-70 people. I began to explain what systems of oppression are, when a participant stated "the only privilege that exists is white privilege." The dialogue quickly went into debate mode, although I tried to prevent it. Then the participant turned the focus on to me rather than what I was teaching. For example, he said "as a woman of color you are diluting the concept of privilege to protect White people from feeling bad." I replied "as a woman of color, I know that privilege is multifaceted including white, male, straight, upper class... ." He continued to interrupt me as I spoke.

Sandra shared that for her this experience was challenging emotionally because she felt an array of emotions including feeling personally disrespected, embarrassed, angry and intimidated. She shared that she was able to manage her emotions by "continuing to breathe, scan the room, trying to exercise compassion for the person who was interrupting me, and promising myself time later on in the day to deal with my emotions."

For most of the facilitators, it was noted that it was important to constantly remain mindful that a dialogue is not a debate; it's not about an individual proving or disproving a position. For the facilitators in this study, modeling appropriate emotions and dialogue structure was important in managing negative emotions. An example of this was that if someone is raising their voice, the facilitator should maintain a mild tone. Additionally, if someone begins to make personal attacks, it was imperative that individuals not respond back with personal attacks; "do not meet fire with fire".

Upon reflecting procedurally on what happened in that particular incident, Sandra shared that although she had tried to prevent the dialogue from becoming a debate she was initially unsuccessful. She indicated that it took some time for her to redirect the group away from debate and back towards dialogue and shared that this was achieved by taking the focus off of just her and the other individual and inviting other voices into the discussion. She “asked the group if they had any thoughts and used their thoughts to bring the focus back to the subject at hand”. She also went back and revisited the community norms the group had created prior to engaging in the dialogue. She concluded that this experience has influenced the way she now engages in difficult dialogues in that she tries to ensure that the focus and attention is not on her, the facilitator, but rather on the group by ensuring that she invites other voices into the dialogue quickly. She also notes that she is better able to now assess when someone wants to debate rather than dialogue and is better equipped to keep the dialogue from becoming a debate.

Sandra also stated that professionally she learned from this experience not to take another’s anger so personally recognizing that “Oh you're not angry at me, you're angry at something else.” She is now able to respond with things like “I'm noticing you're having this reaction. Can you tell me what this is about,” and address it in that way. She noted that, emotionally what she learned from this experience was that although it took a while before she felt comfortable being with large groups again, she thinks” the experience made me stronger, and showed me I am capable of handling difficult situations.” She also learned that self-care as a facilitator is an important part of the job and notes that for her “therapy is huge to be able to unpack and work through stuff so that

you're not doing that with your students or your co-facilitators.” She also noted that “the debrief with your co-facilitators is also a really powerful space to be able to ask, what came up for you during this time when we were facilitating this?”

Martin also reflected the need for self-care as follows:

Even though you're trying to function as a neutral, sometimes the issues of the people get to you in different ways and when you're there in the situation you try to not let that show or you might turn it into an observation you make, and then you have to do your own private work when you're done with the session and thinking about it and trying to recover from it, because some of this stuff sticks to you. As a facilitator, I recover from a difficult dialogue by going for a long walk, playing a match of tennis, or talking with a colleague.”

While John disclosed that “I manage my emotions through personal prayer and processing these sessions with another chaplain. I try to keep my own emotions separate.” All the participants in this study shared that they make sure to make time for themselves to decompress, particularly after difficult dialogues, so that they are able to effectively continue to engage and facilitate dialogues.

Research Question Three: Themes

Research question three focused on what, if any, indications there are that the process of engaging in difficult dialogues across difference contributes to transformed perspectives? Specifically, research question three asked: *What, if any, indications are there that the process of engaging in difficult dialogues across points of difference contribute to transformed perspectives?*

Transformative Effects on Dialogue Facilitators

During the course of the interviews, each participant was asked how they believe engaging in the dialogue process has affected and/or transformed their own perspectives. The results of this inquiry highlighted that for the study participants, engagement in the dialogue process proved to be transformative in that they emerged with a much deeper understanding of themselves, their points of view and experiences, as well as the experiences and perspectives of others. For Julia,

The biggest transformation for me, I think, is when in moments I want to be defensive about something. Not. Just listen. Not make it about a defense of something that I hear someone commenting on. Although I may feel like I want to get defensive about it I just focus on breathing and not turning it into a personal thing and getting defensive about it. For me it's about just being able to step back and say "Okay, all right." Just responding very differently to it, without the tone that says I'm defensive. That's going to set the conversation on a different course, right? It's going to make it more productive, but you have to be willing to suffer through [hearing] it, because it' can be hard.

For Sam he stated that,

Dialogue like a lot of humanistic endeavors, teaches you about people and their fears and their anxieties and what they can tolerate and what they can't tolerate. I think from doing this work for a long time, I think I tend to be a more deliberate person, thinking more deeply about what is necessary. I'm a more patient person, I hope a more empathic person because I think empathy is really important. Additionally, as an attorney, I used to be more interested in

reaching an agreement rather than understanding the underlying cause of a conflict. I have learned to look at the cause, understanding the motivations, understanding what are the forces that bring about people to be in conflict and then work towards resolving the conflict if possible.

Martin stated that,

I think it's helped me be less judgmental because when you take a stance of curiosity towards people even when they espouse values or positions that you don't agree with, or that you object to, or that you find horrible you can still find something redeeming in almost anyone you interact with.

He also noted that he is a competitive person, “but the more I’ve done this work the less winning matters to me.”

For John, engaging in dialogue has made him more acutely aware of our own need for forgiveness and grace in our lives and reminds him regularly of the passages in the Bible which state “do not judge, lest you be judged” and “take the log out of your own eye, so that you can take the speck out of your brother's eye.” Engaging in dialogue has led him to greater self-understanding and the belief that “the more we understand other people, the greater potential there is for us to care for them and love them.”

For Vicki, she feels that engaging in dialogues has given her “a much higher comfort level with engaging in conflict and acknowledging different perspectives and different points of view.” She shared that now when someone presents a different point of view she’s more inclined to respond with, “that’s interesting, I hadn’t thought of it that way before. Tell me more.”

Lisa notes that for her initially,

I thought it [dialogue] was just talk and I dominated conversations because it was about race and I was a black woman who was interested in race. I didn't understand that there were benefits if I listened to other people. So I would probably say the biggest thing for me was switching from talking to listening. I also recognize that I used to really enjoy debate and realize that I don't enjoy it a bit now, not a bit. I find it to be very unproductive, even on things that are two-sided and fact driven. I also would say that I now recognize that we're all dealing with pain in different ways and just understanding that has been transformative for me.

Sandra notes that,

I've learned how to be much more vulnerable. Through engaging I think I've learned some of the things that I think are most quirky or awkward about me are actually pretty common. It definitely makes me feel a bit more human in that way. I definitely think it's increased my level of compassion and empathy for others. I'm much slower to anger. I've learned how to be a better listener and I would certainly say I've learned how to ask better open ended questions. I think, probably one of the most transformative pieces of facilitating dialogue for me is that I pay attention to people better and it's taught me how to empower other people to be able to speak [and share their narrative] .

Each of the participants in the study indicated that facilitating groups engaging in the dialogue process has led to transformative learning in their own viewpoints and use of dialogue. They reported that it has instilled in them greater self-awareness and made them more reflective. For most, it has transformed how they interact with others and has

instilled in them greater compassion, empathy, and understanding. They are more keenly aware of how their personal experiences have shaped their perspectives and that others have different personal experiences that have shape their perspectives as well. Additionally, they are more inclined to want to listen, learn about, and understand how someone else sees the world, rather than argue or debate about whose perspective is right. They have learned to respect the dignity and humanity of others, even when they don't necessarily agree with them.

Benefit of Dialogue for Interlocutors

Each participant also provided an explanation as to why she/he believes dialogue is important. John commented that,

If we're going to have the kind of society that's going to solve the larger problems in life, I think we have to develop an ability to talk with one another in a mature manner; it's self-evident that if you have a functioning society that's healthy, there's disagreement. But there's a language for talking through those disagreements.

Most of the study's participants expressed that the practice of dialogue often increases mutual understanding of and respect for different points of views and beliefs and assists interlocutors in exploring differences and identifying common ground and values. A common theme shared by participants is that the practice of learning how dialogue is central to our ability to understand and sometimes appreciate perspectives other than our own and how it assists individuals in learning to mediate and/or resolve conflict. Sam shared his concern that, "It seems that political polarization grows every year as we isolate ourselves from both the people and ideas we don't like." He recalled his

experience in Ferguson, Missouri where a group of White and Black students came together in a dialogue about race and observed that:

Afterwards a Black girl and a White girl were talking to each other, they were about 18 or 19 years old and they had been from different campuses; they didn't know each other. They were involved in a very serious, in-depth 10 minute conversation. The Black girl spent most of the time talking about her circumstances and the White girl was asking questions and using everything she could use to understand and listen. I'm sure they'd never met each other or talked to each other before and this [dialogue] proved a to be a great opportunity for them to share and try to understand the other's point of view on a very difficult issue.

Lisa noted that,

I've watched people go from I think it's silly that we're having this talk about race because where I'm from race doesn't matter, to I am an advocate in the most authentic ways for people who are different from me. Or they come to the understanding that my opinions on race don't matter as much as another's lived experiences with their race and others. They learn to not simply agree to disagree, but to actually care about another person and their ideas even if they don't agree.

Lisa added that,

By engaging in dialogue, particularly sustained dialogues, individuals are better equipped to address community problems and to build relationships across lines of difference that wouldn't otherwise exist. There's this piece of bringing people together so that their relationships are transformed in a way that permits new

actions to take place.

Vicki commented that,

The container of a dialogue allows us to shift our focus of attention from I know what I know and I know I'm right to isn't this interesting, look at all these different perspectives that are interweaving and overlapping and diverging. Let's look at how they're similar and different, let's look at what are areas of overlap and common concern, what are areas of difference. It turns it into a genuine curiosity and investigation of let's try to understand this and then we turn into a joint curiosity where we need each other to understand this better because I can't understand what you're thinking and you can't understand what I'm thinking but together we can help each other understand what is this whole complex puzzle of different perspectives created by our different areas that we're coming from.

Dialogue allows interlocutors the opportunity to identify some of the challenges they will face as they work together to achieve shared goals. She notes that some of the benefits she has seen come out of individuals engaging in dialogues is that,

Prisoners are released, mothers get to visit their children in prison, sick people get to cross a ceasefire line to get better medical care, farmers get water for irrigation, and villages are saved from a potential explosion that could have made a tsunami of water come out of an aging dam.

Vicki noted that for her she recognizes that one of the main transformations she sees among her learners who engage in dialogue is the recognition that diversity and difference within the group provides a greater opportunity to learn from each other.

They seem to have an increased sense of curiosity and appreciate there is an opportunity

for learning from others and diverse perspectives. For the groups she has facilitated she notes that they are in the hopes that they are “helping make the world a better place by working to prevent future escalation of conflict because when there is more understanding, people are better able to look for ways forward that are inclusive of everyone's views.”

Sandra noted,

I think we're going to continue to live in a more diverse world, hopefully. To be able to listen to someone who has a different experience from you, recognize that you have something to learn from everyone, recognize that your story is valid, that we're constantly changing and that's okay, that society does influence us, that we have some sort of agency in how we show up in society and that the decisions that we make have an impact on people more than just us, even when we don't think that. I definitely think that there's a level of exposure and thinking beyond one's self, but also coming to terms with one self at the same time. Both of those are happening. To recognize that systems of oppression, although we might experience them differently, that it doesn't help humanity overall. How do we work collectively to change that? How do we work collectively to change some of the isms or some of the structures that are harming people?

She added that,

In my own experience, I see social justice and inclusion work becoming very theoretical and inaccessible, which is ironic because here we are trying to create more access for everyone, or at least equitable access. Yet so much of what we talk about, I think when I go home and I try and communicate with some of these

concepts with my family, they don't understand. That's not a reflection of their intellect, it's that a lot of this is so theoretical and intellectualized where I don't know that we've done a good job as a field, and by field I mean anyone who does diversity and inclusion work to be able to translate what we know theoretically into a set of skills. I see dialogue as some of those skills, so I have an awareness of what systems of oppression are or micro aggressions are, which is great for me to have an awareness, but what does it mean for me to engage in a conversation or a dialogue with someone and I accidentally micro aggress them? How do we work through that? How do I work through it when someone micro aggresses me? I might theoretically know about what it means to be socialized as a woman or a girl, but what would it mean for me to actually share that story with someone else and then be able to share the ways that they've been socialized as well? I really see it as the practice of something that's much more theoretical. Connected to dialogue, one of the most significant skills is being able to listen, which I think is just an underrated skill to begin with, but I think listening is what makes dialogue even more important than maybe other social justice-like skills that we develop because everything in our society is telling us not to listen.

It was clear from the study participants that they believed that the learning environment provides a wonderful space/opportunity to explore ideas, perspectives, and viewpoints, including opposing views particularly because learning environments provide a diversity of perspectives because they often bring people together who may never have met elsewhere. Vicki asserted that,

There's a possibility to turn the classroom into this great opportunity and a safe

place to learn from each other. A place to try and understand where these different views are coming from and what are the underlying assumptions behind them, it's an opportunity to try and understand the thinking that leads to these different conclusions.

For Julia, she noted that she has observed that for the participants in the dialogues she facilitates, that they express that,

They recognize that dialogue is different, it is not about winning. They begin to consider, what does it mean to win? What does it mean to work together? It's not about you, yourself, your team winning. Initially they come in to the dialogue thinking they're going to win [a debate or something]. They think hey, I've got this. Then it's like, hey, I don't have this. This is harder. It's complicated and there are all these competing interests and perspectives. There's a lot to this [dialogue], so it challenges them from a strategic place and an intellectual place.

She also asserted that she has observed as an educator that there is a need for dialogue because as she notes,

There's been a ground swell of support for it [dialogue] and I don't think there would be if it wasn't needed somewhere. You know what I mean? I think the fact that we get so many requests and so much interest in it, in the skills of it that it's like, okay, this is something important.

Martin noted that he has witnessed the transformation among some interlocutors “gradually learning to adopt different ways of interacting with people, modulating their own emotionality.” He explained that that meant for some that if they were angry they no longer just had an outburst of anger, but instead found ways of saying they were angry

that didn't "intimidate someone". He noted that "there's a difference between my exploding at you and my saying, I was really angry when you called me...whatever."

The majority of the study participants noted that simply engaging in the practice of dialogue was beneficial for interlocutors because for most, they were unfamiliar with the process. Through engagement, individuals they facilitated learned how to actively listen to understand others' points of view, respectfully interact, and openly share their experiences without trying to debate or win an argument. They also noted that many of the participants learned that people see things differently and that there is something to learn from people who hold different views. Some of the participants shared that they have witnessed how engagement in the dialogue process has led some to work together to enact change within their communities and has brought people together who may never have interacted with one another before.

Summary of Study Findings

This chapter presents the cross case findings of this qualitative case study which was conducted in order to explore how educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference. Themes shared in this study were derived from in vivo coding and included specific quotes which provided in depth descriptions on how study participants engage in the process of dialogue facilitation. Three research questions served as the basis of this study. Research question one queried, *what factors do experienced conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding educators perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process?* The study found seven primary themes related to research question one: *understanding the dialogue process,*

challenges, developing dialogue skills, creating a conducive environment, safe space and brave space, facilitator role, knowledge, and skills, and participant role, knowledge, and skills. The majority of the study participants shared that orienting towards dialogue was an important factor in engaging in effective dialogue as most of the people with whom they work with possess little understanding of the nature and process of dialogue. For many, acquainting would-be interlocutors with other forms of communication including conversation, discussion, and debate is an important first step in differentiating and understanding dialogue.

Research question two probed, *how do these educators while involved within a dialogue pertaining to conflictual content and diverse perspectives manage emotions, their own and those of others, when they emerge?* Three themes for research question two emerged: *emotions are important in the dialogue process, owning one's emotions, and facilitator experiences with emotion.* From the study, it was clear that participants believe that emotions are an important and expected part of the dialogue process and should not be suppressed. Instead, facilitators must learn how to navigate emotions, allow space for them when appropriate, and ensure that people express their feelings in a constructive way through the use of "I" statements that allow the sharing of personal narratives that do not attack, blame, generalize the "other". Finally, research question three asked, *what, if any, indications are there that the process of engaging in difficult dialogues across points of difference contribute to transformed perspectives?* The two themes that emerge for research question three were: *transformative effects on dialogue facilitators and benefit of dialogue for interlocutors.* Study participants indicated that engaging in dialogues did contribute to transformed perspectives for both the facilitators as well as the participants in that they grew in awareness and understanding that others

possess differences of perspectives due to different lived experiences. Some noted that they have even witnessed participants engage in positive social action towards change as a result of engaging in dialogue. Additionally, facilitators noted that they themselves learned to be more self-aware and reflective as a result of engagement and that they have learned to be more compassionate and empathetic towards others. A more in depth look at the implications of these findings are addressed in the final chapter.

V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Significant learning regularly occurs in collaboration and dialogue with others. As a result, educators often serve not only as presenters of information but regularly act as facilitators who encourage learning through conversation, group discussion, and dialogue. Sometimes, educators are called upon to manage difficult discourses which may arise in diverse learning environments; however, facilitating difficult dialogues remains a daunting endeavor for many educators with few published studies focused exclusively on instructor experiences in facilitating difficult dialogues. Gaining such an understanding of such experiences is important in helping educators recognize that difficult dialogues do not need to be avoided, but instead offer important opportunities for increased learning. Accordingly, the central purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the experiences of experienced dialogue facilitators who have facilitated difficult or tension-filled dialogues among participants who hold diverse perspectives in the hopes that, through this research, strategies might be identified that may assist other adult educators in navigating difficult dialogues that might arise in the learning environment.

Discussion of Key Findings

This chapter presents an interpretation and discussion of key findings from cross case analysis of data collected as part of this study as related to each of the three research questions, as well as conclusions and recommendations of this study. Emerging from the cross-case findings of this study, I have also attempted to depict what I believe are the key elements or conditions that undergird the manner in which experienced dialogue facilitators successfully navigate difficult dialogues in the learning environment. It is

hoped that this framework might be useful in helping other educators interested in facilitating dialogue better understand the key elements study participants perceived as important to constructively engaging adults in dialogues, including difficult dialogues, so that they might incorporate them into their own learning environment.

Understanding the Dialogue Process

Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) note that “Sharing perspectives through dialogue lies at the heart of learning” (p. 243); however, a lack of understanding or familiarity with dialogue as a distinctive communication method is one of the major problems facing individuals desiring to engage in or facilitate dialogue. Although, there currently exists a great deal of literature describing dialogue as a communication method, the analysis of data collected in this study indicates that many people are still unfamiliar with the nature and process of dialogue or how to facilitate constructive dialogues, particularly across conflict laden topics. The data indicate that the vast majority of people are more familiar with the communication method of debate rather than dialogue because debate is the communication style that is most frequently modeled within our society (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999; Tannen, 1998; Yankelovich, 1999) and within education. As noted by Tannen (1998) there currently exists a “pervasive warlike atmosphere that makes us approach public dialogue, and just about anything with need to accomplish, as if it were a fight” (p. 3) where frequently, exchanges of ideas become acrimonious and lead to defending previously held views rather than trying to understand other, differing views. As explained by Sam,

I think when people are given the opportunity to have a dialogue I think people don't necessarily understand the objectives are to reach some sort of

understanding. They think of it as an opportunity to raise grievances in often a very confrontational way.

Often, the use of an abstract concept such as dialogue does not adequately describe the fundamental behaviors or practices that are employed during dialogue facilitation. Accordingly, the study suggests that learning what dialogue is and how to engage in it constructively remains an important element for facilitators to understand and share with others interested in engaging in the dialogue process. In fact, the majority of the participants within this study indicated that few if any potential interlocutors they meet enter any dialogue with prior knowledge or experience with dialogue as described within this study.

From the literature regarding the theory and practice of dialogue as well as interviews with participants it became clear that engaging in dialogue is a different kind of communication method from what most are accustomed to, and the way in which the participants within this study understand and engage in dialogue is rather different from how many commonly understand the meaning and practice of dialogue. Although none of the study participants' definition were exactly the same, the majority of the participants described dialogue as a communication process oriented towards enhancing understanding rather than debating, persuading, or winning an argument. Ultimately, dialogue's purpose was defined simply as a communication style oriented towards listening to enhance understanding or engage in collective inquiry (Bohm, 1996). Many of the participants noted that although often the term dialogue is used synonymously with other forms of communication like discussion or conversation, it is more than simply a discussion or conversation. In addition, it was revealed further that dialogue is not a

negotiation, mediation, or in and of itself an attempt to resolve conflict, although the understanding that emerges from engaging in dialogue does aid in advancing efforts to resolve conflict when new awareness gained from dialogue is put into action.

It was noted that an educator, interested in facilitating a dialogue, cannot assume that everyone (or anyone) in the learning environment automatically knows or understands the nature and process of dialogue. Similarly, Alderton (2000) notes that “some difficulties that hindered dialogue occurred when group members had a limited knowledge of dialogue” (p. 110) and its processes. Accordingly, each participant noted that they made time to talk about what dialogue is (and is not) and what are its goals upon meeting with a group. They ensured that individuals understood dialogue as a distinct form of communication in that requires interlocutors to be willing to suspend judgement while actively listening to the experiences and perspectives of another in order to understand more deeply how and why someone might possess a different perspective than one’s own.

The majority of the participants noted that when teaching a class, the conversation about dialogue takes place early, generally as part of the introduction. For the majority of the participants, they noted that upon first meeting with any group they introduce and teach what it means to engage in a dialogue, how it differs from other forms of communication, and the skills necessary to effectively engage in the process of dialogue. Some of the study participants shared that educators could include a written statement providing a definition or description of dialogue, sometimes including a section about dialogue within a syllabus if they are teaching in a college classroom. Others noted that they might have the group share their thoughts about dialogue verbally in order to

establish a definition of dialogue that might work for the group and then write down an agreed upon definition somewhere to help them visually refer to it as a way to differentiate between debate and dialogue.

Dialogue Skills. It was clear that the participants in the study believed that the ability to engage dialogue is a skill that must be learned; it is not innate. The study revealed that study participants shared many similar views pertaining to the nature and practice of dialogue including the view that dialogue utilizes important interpersonal skills (see Figure 2) including active listening, suspending judgment, asking open-ended questions, sharing personal narratives, use of “I” statements, respecting others, and critically reflecting, and indicated that it was important to present interlocutors with some of these fundamental orientations or skills of dialogue prior to engaging in the dialogue process.

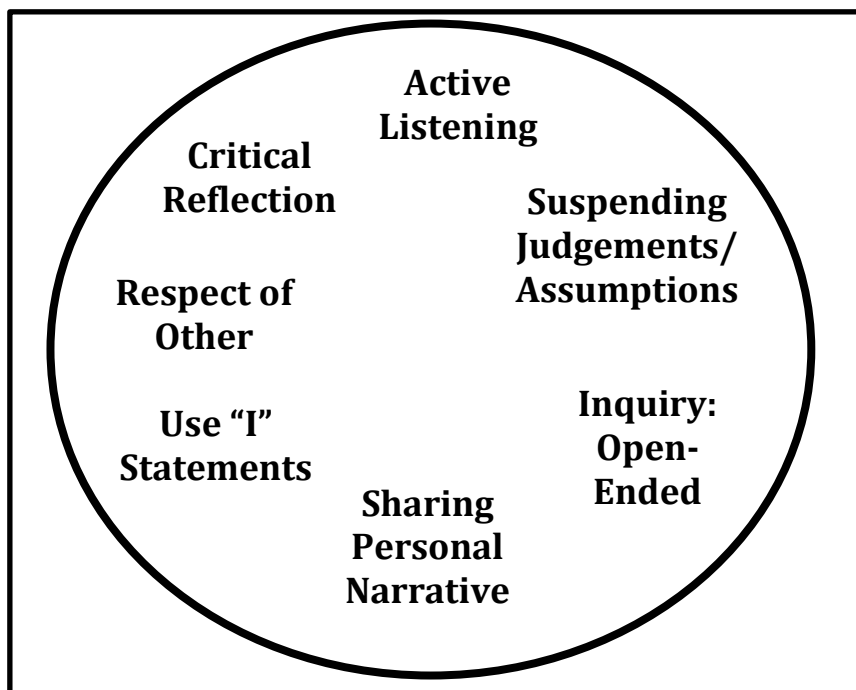


Figure 2 Dialogue Skills

Some mentioned that opportunities to ask open-ended questions, practicing using

“I” statements when sharing, and engaging in active listening exercises were good ways for learners to hone interpersonal important skills associated with dialogue. Lisa shared that she sees two sets of benefits from engaging in dialogue:

There are the formal benefits of being in a real process or learning dialogue skills formally. Increased empathy, ability to put yourself in somebody else’s shoes; ability to explain the climate and need from your knowledge of others, anecdotes and experiences. Those are very formal, very important I think for any leadership role or future professional development; the communication skills, the professional stuff that comes from empathy. Then there’s what we call the barbecue skills, those personal skills which increase capability to relate to others in order to cultivate better relationships.

Interpersonal Skill Development. Study findings suggest that each dialogue skill is an important interpersonal skill that helps people communicate more effectively with others and enhances learning by helping individuals think and learn together. The incorporation of dialogue skills benefits individuals by allowing them the opportunity to practice important interpersonal skills that will help them better interact with others in myriad activities and communications. They are important interpersonal skills that will benefit learners long after they leave the learning environment. Dialogue allows for more inclusive ways of understanding or knowing and can foster improved personal awareness as well as greater openness to other perspectives and human understanding. As we prepare for an increasingly complex social environment that brings with it ever growing social tensions, Patterson (1987) states that it is important to cultivate people who can understand others and who can accept and respect others as well as themselves.

Emphasizing compassion, self-awareness, and cooperation promotes greater appreciation for one another, the potential of human beings to solve problems, and respect for other perspectives. With the growing diversity and complexity of an increasing interconnected world, the ability to work together and become more fully aware of one's self makes this type of educated individual better equipped to recognize the needs of society and their responsibility therein in order to develop ways to create solutions to difficult and ever increasing human and societal problems (Wheatley, 2009).

Goleman (1997) notes that “a key social ability is empathy, understanding others' feelings and taking their perspective, and respecting differences in how people feel about things” (p. 268). A great deal of interpersonal skill development that promotes healthy relationships require empathy as well as the ability to become a good active listener, skillful at asking open ended questions, awareness of self and personal judgements, and an ability to constructively manage emotions through emotional self-awareness and regulation.

Regardless of what discipline or area of expertise an educator works in, study participants pointed out that any educator could consider how to invite an opportunity for learners to share in the practice of dialogue and/or the skills associated with it. They also noted that each of these skills can be included in various ways, within any curriculum, and utilizing other styles or methods of communication. For some of the participants, active listening skills were sometimes practiced by utilizing exercises that require people to listen to someone else and then discussing with that person, what they've understood in order to ensure that they are able to accurately reflect what the person meant and/or intended to say. Consistent with the literature pertaining to dialogue and from the

findings from this study, individuals “who are inexperienced in dialogue will need to learn how to ask dialogue-enhancing questions and practice asking them if dialogue is to be sustained (Alderton, 2000, p. 126). In effect, individuals engaged in dialogue need to employ the use of open-ended questions rather than closed ended questions or statements; all skills that can be incorporated and practiced in the learning environment with existing curriculum.

Establish Conducive Environment for Dialogue

Study participants indicated that in order to facilitate a successful dialogue, it is important to create a conducive environment for dialogue to take place. For study participants this means orienting for dialogue by confirming there is an understanding and “willingness to engage through dialogue rather than through more habitual means” like debating. Vicki explains that she begins by pointing out to the group that,

We are a diverse group and more of your learning is going to happen from learning from each other than from learning from me. I hope you learn something from me but I really expect that most of the learning will happen as you learn from each other because you're each coming from different perspectives and this is gold that you've got in this classroom here, people who see things differently and you can learn from them.

Lisa shared that she often explains to the group that “We're going to listen harder when we disagree and try to figure out the sources of disagreement rather than shut down alternative points of view”.

Additionally, many of the participants shared that an educator interested in facilitating dialogues in the learning environment should begin by orienting learners to

the practice of dialogue and its purpose including establishing some ground rules about respecting others and differences of opinion. An educator interested in facilitating dialogue can invite individuals to discuss openly with one another expectations they have about engaging in dialogue in order to collectively create something like ground rules, community norms, or conditions for success. As indicated by most of the participants, there is a discussion and an agreement outlined by the group about what the group norms or ground rules are before dialogue begins. Many of the participants shared that they might ask the group questions like “What do we expect from each other in this learning environment?” “What do you expect from me?” or “What are our expectations on how we should treat one another? What should the consequences be if these norms are violated?”

Create a Safe, Brave Space for Dialogue. The ability to engage in effective dialogue about difficult subjects requires that interlocutors do so in a safe and supportive environment which helps to establish trust and/or a sense of community among the group. In fact, the discussion of a “safe” space appeared vital to ensuing that interlocutors were able to continue to engage in an authentic dialogue with one another. Arao and Clemens (2013) describe the practice of creating a safe space as the process where “ground rules or guidelines for conversations and behavior” are established within the learning environment “that allows students to engage with one another over controversial issues with honesty, sensitivity, and respect”(p. 135).

However, the reality that individuals might possibly conflate discomfort with not feeling safe, or that one might conflate discomfort with being at risk led two of the study participants to offer different perspectives from the other five participants regarding the establishment of a “safe” space. Rather than a “safe” space, they asserted that one cannot

guarantee “safety” in dialogue because an individual may hear or learn another’s perspective that may be hurtful, emotionally. Instead, Sandra preferred to use the phrase “brave” space rather than “safe” space and explained that,

It's going in knowing that there is a risk that your feelings will get hurt, or something will be said. You may say something and you will be challenged or held accountable in a way that you are unfamiliar with that you might associate with a personal attack or being triggered in some ways...

Lisa noted that she does not guarantee safety and preferred to explain that a dialogue “is an active space” where people “engage in tough topics.” She noted that “to do this [dialogue] for real, people have to be real and honest and genuine” and stated that “I know that I'm going to have to get hit with some fire to learn” what some people truthfully believe and “stereotypes they might possess about [for example] blackness”.

Whether creating a “safe”, “brave”, or “active” space, each participant indicated that an important condition for effective dialogue was the need for participants to be willing to engage one another in a respectful and open manner that ultimately allowed for trust among the group. As noted by Sandra, it is important for “People engaging in dialogue to speak openly and listen respectfully and attentively”. “Dialogue excludes attack and defense and avoids derogatory attributions based on assumptions about the motives, meanings, or character of others” (Chasin, Herzig, Roth, Chasin, Becker, Stains, 1996, p. 325). Alderton (2000) reported in his study on dialogue that participants “need to respect each other in dialogue and that it is important to hear what others are saying, even if the topic of discussion is contrary to their own beliefs” (p. 110). The consensus among participants was that safety meant that a space was created where individuals

could voice their perspectives and ask questions without fear of judgment or personal attack. What is shared might be challenged, leading to someone maybe feeling “uncomfortable” but they should feel “safe” even if uncomfortable. Often, it is through the challenging of previously held ideas, views, and/or perspectives that greater understanding, learning, and ultimately growth occurs.

Emotions and Dialogue. The acknowledgement of the importance of emotions as well as how these dialogue facilitators navigate sometimes difficult emotions was another important finding of this study. All the participants indicated that learning through dialogue involves both the cognitive and emotional aspects of learning. Emotions can often be the most challenging part of facilitating dialogues, particularly difficult ones, and can create a situation where some might feel the environment will become “unsafe”, uncomfortable, or, for educators, unmanageable. Van Aacken (2013) asserts that some literature on education claim that “most educators work to control or suppress the occurrence of emotions within the educational setting” (p. 174) and that Dirkx (2008), Varlander (2008), and Weiss (2000) “pointed out that intense emotional expression can be difficult to control in the classroom setting” (p. 184). However, the participants within this study maintained that emotions are an important part of the dialogue process and are often a fundamental part of the learning experience that should not be avoided or suppressed. In this study, Vicki highlighted that “Emotions are a natural part of the human reaction” particularly when engaging in dialogues over difficult or conflict laden topics. The role of emotions while addressing difficult topics is an important and real phenomena in dialogue as “many of our cherished beliefs, values, and assumptions are questioned, provoking difficult emotions” (Wang, 2008, p. 10). The

participants in this study maintain that it is important to acknowledge emotions and, as a facilitator, to ensure that the individual sharing their emotions “owns” what they say by using “I” statements rather than blaming or personally attacking others. In fact, Goleman (1997) comments that critical incidents in which exchanges between individuals became emotionally heated become excellent opportunities to not only delve deeper into differing perspectives but practice important interpersonal skills of not attacking or name calling as well as provide opportunities for individuals to enhance their own emotional intelligence by being better able to identify emotions and distinguish between them. Some of the participants posited that engaging in dialogue provides a valuable and often needed space to develop and practice emotional intelligence and has proven to possess the potential to help interlocutors increase their capacity for empathy.

Facilitator Skill

A significant finding from this research was that dialogues appear to be more effective when they are well-facilitated. Similarly, Schirch and Campt (2007) stated that “the role of the facilitator may be the most important element of a dialogue” (p. 58). The participants in this study noted that one should not expect individuals who agree to engage in the dialogue process to come to the process with any prior dialogue knowledge or skills; it is the facilitator who will acquaint individuals with the nature and process of dialogue before the dialogue begins. Sam shared that “one of the challenges I think for facilitators from the beginning is setting appropriate expectations.” Thus a facilitator should, as noted by Bohm (1996) begin first by talking about dialogue, what it is, why the group is engaging in it and expectations for how it will be implemented in the context. Dialogue facilitators establish important conditions in order to effectively facilitate

dialogues and successfully navigate difficult ones. Facilitators help to create a conducive environment for dialogue by assisting in the establishment of group norms or ground rules and help “participants focus on listening to and working with each other” (p. 8) rather than debating. They are responsible for adjusting and modeling how they communicate particularly with someone who is angry or defensive. The establishment of community norms or ground rules is done in order to create a safe, although not necessarily comfortable, space for dialogue to occur. While community norms or ground rules are most often established in consensus among the group rather than by the facilitator, Sam and Martin pointed out that sometimes facilitators have to establish the norms for the group particularly for special public dialogues that have limited time or few scheduled meetings.

Many of the study participants shared that as facilitators they try to create an environment in which people are more comfortable talking, which includes inviting participation, offering other people the opportunity to talk, or asking specific people who haven't been speaking or going around the table and asking everyone to say something. They practice affirming when people participate, affirming their participation sometimes by simply just thanking someone for offering their opinion. The majority noted that it is important not to ridicule people when they say something or ask a question.

Most participants indicated it is important to ensure that a facilitator models dialogue and listening. As identified by Bandura (1977) “much of human behavior development occurs through modeling and is also linked to observational learning” (Evinger, 2014, p. 127). For instance, John shared how an educator might model dialogue in their method of teaching:

Educators can help students by modeling dialogue in their classrooms, rather than presentations with one-way communication. They can also create scenarios involving controversial, emotional issues that test a student's ability to dialogue with other students. These exercises can help them understand the weaknesses in their own style of communicating and listening. Also they can keep the learning environment interactive and discussion-oriented.; making dialogue as important as the content. Finally, learning content should be well-seasoned with questions and opportunities for dialogue among learners.

When asked how they incorporate dialogue into the learning environment, it was revealed that most put aside time and allow for dialogue. Many set up occasions where people had the opportunity to be in dialogue and utilized exercises that involve dialogue among learners where they talk about the material presented rather than simply "banking information" (Freire, 1970) into the learner.

Facilitation of Dialogue. Freire (1998) notes that education or learning takes place when individuals "who occupy somewhat different spaces" engage in an ongoing dialogue whereby together they seek to "explore what each knows and what they can teach each other" (p. 8). As such, educators can provide individuals a space and opportunity to better understand one another (teachable skill). Diversity of thought is an important part of learning and dialogue is a useful process for "thinking together" (Isaacs, 1999). In any learning environment, space should be provided where ideas can be openly shared, expressed, and debated; where interlocutors know that they will be listened to, especially when they present ideas and information that might be unpopular. Freire believed in helping adults learn through dialogue with one another and even referred to

“teachers” as “coordinators of discussion or debate and dialogue” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 84). Educators should be willing to lead courageous conversations with learners where individuals are led into intellectually unfamiliar and, at times uncomfortable, territory. It is important that they too learn how to orient towards dialogue, actively listen, ask open ended questions, reframing things for interlocutors when necessary, withhold judgment, and learn to value other people’s input even when they disagree with it. Freire (1998) asserts that “respect for the autonomy and dignity of every person is an ethical imperative” including educators because respecting the dignity of the learner(s) facilitates an environment where “true” dialogue can emerge allowing among individuals to “learn and grow by confronting their differences” (p. 59). He further maintains that, “the basis of our [the educator] encounter ought to be a respect for the differences between us and an acknowledgement of the coherence between what I say and what I do.” (p. 120).

Multi-Partiality and Neutrality. It has been well established that academic freedom allows academics to have a point of view. However, it was noted by participants that the real challenge in facilitation is that as a facilitator, one has to be able to remove oneself in many respects from their own political and/or social perspective of things and present themselves in a different, more neutral way. The majority of the study participants noted that as facilitators they work to remain neutral because if they present themselves in that way, they're better able to facilitate dialogues among people who possess different points of view. For most, it requires a conscious effort to remain neutral and non-judgmental so that they allow space for all perspectives to be shared and have the trust of the group to help reframe for an individual what is said in maybe an angry and

defensive way so that someone else might hear what was said rather than the anger alone.

However, a number of participants noted that they are mindful that true objectivity and neutrality are difficult to achieve due to inherent biases each person possesses. Instead, the term multi-partiality arose whereby facilitators, while genuinely striving to remain neutral, described that they practiced ensuring that every individual engaged in a dialogue is provided equal attention and opportunity to share their experiences in an effort to equalize social power within the group; one participant even noted that sometimes for dialogues over race or gender more than one facilitator from different backgrounds that reflect the group will be incorporated to try and equalize social power. For two of the participants, those who primarily facilitated dialogues regarding diversity and multicultural issues, they discussed that they situate themselves in the conversation as an “equal” participants sharing their own personal thoughts, experiences, and feelings; often revealing their own social and political positions (Wang, 2008; Murray-Johnson, 2015) with the group. They strived to be transparent while remaining mindful not to shut anyone down. It appeared that by practicing multi-partiality numerous perspectives were brought forth rather than just a few, often more dominant perspectives, allowing for deeper inquiry regarding various viewpoints. Multi-partiality allows a space for various perspectives, including dissenting perspectives to emerge and be explored by the collective. Additionally, by encouraging all participants to share, even unpopular perspectives, individual opinions and biases can be seen more clearly and contribute more deeply to greater understanding. The facilitators also noted that it was important to not only include all the perspectives held by individuals of the group, but that they attempt to share perspectives that might not be represented or are missing

among the group in order to ensure that as many perspectives as possible are shared and discussed.

However, educators who wish to engage learners in dialogue, particularly difficult dialogues, should consider whether or not they are comfortable with conflict and difficult emotions. Sandra shared that,

I think for an educator, first and foremost, they have to be prepared to say at times, "This is not the place to discuss that." I think that that's appropriate. I think it's better for an educator to say no to something that they're not comfortable with and they don't feel the class is ready for, than to say yes to something they're uncertain with and lead down a road that the educator can't really manage and manage in the classroom.

Furthermore, because effective engagement in the dialogue process, particularly with difficult topics, requires a willingness to engage in the process and possibly be uncomfortable with what is shared, educators should inform learners that they are free to leave at any time if uncomfortable or unwilling to engage in dialogue without fear of reprisal; particularly because they did not intend to participate in such difficult dialogue. Because entering into what might be a difficult dialogue requires entering into what was described by one participant as a “brave” space participants should be willing, not forced.

Conclusions

The literature and findings of this study clearly highlight and substantiate the importance of acquiring knowledge through communicative interactions including dialogue. However, although much is known about the importance of dialogue in the learning process; the study suggested that very little literature exists on how to facilitate

constructive dialogues, particularly difficult ones in the learning environment. Therefore, an important and overarching conclusion of this research was that dialogue facilitators establish important conditions in order to facilitate effective and constructive dialogues in the learning environment. Figure 3 represents my interpretation of the key conditions necessary for effective dialogue facilitation as derived from the research data. At the heart of the figure, in the center of the concentric rings, lies effective dialogue. Figure 3 illustrates that in order to achieve effective dialogue, three important conditions must be met: increasing participant understanding of dialogue process, establishing a conducive environment for dialogue to occur, and utilizing fundamental facilitator skills.

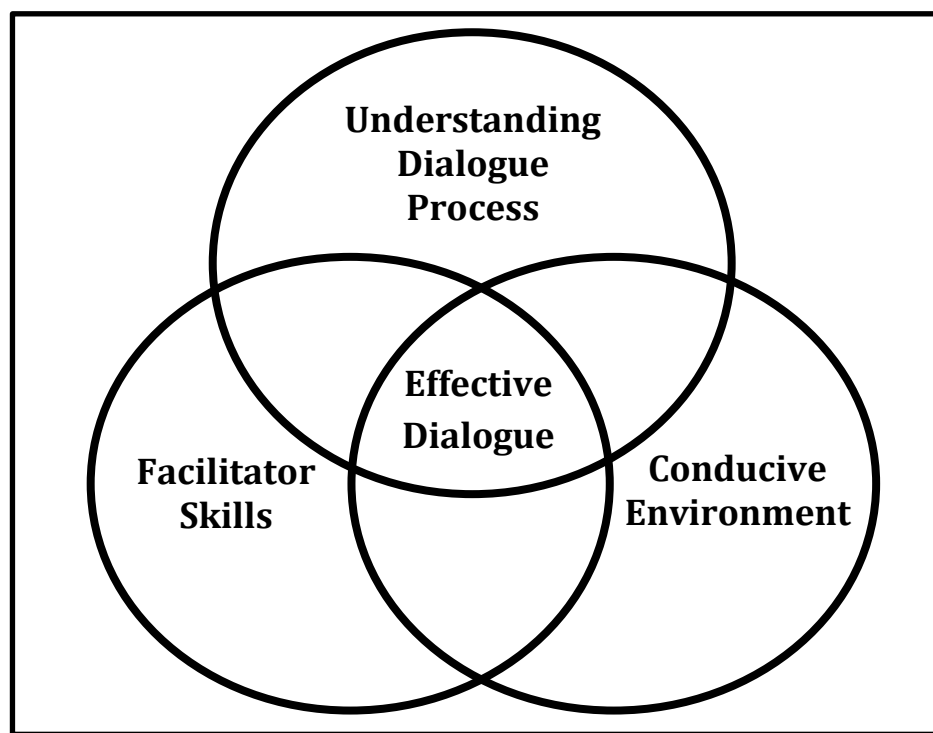


Figure 3 Conditions for Effective Dialogue Facilitation

The results of this research indicate that more often than not what is being called a “dialogue” simply lacks the structure and process necessary to be considered genuine dialogue, as defined in this research. Findings suggest that even within education what is

often *referred* to as a dialogue within many learning environments is more akin to group discussions, conversations, and/or debates as individuals engage in the intellectual exchange of ideas regularly in an effort to convince, persuade, and/or win the intellectual argument rather than listening to understand. In addition, the creation of a conducive environment where learners feel safe to freely express themselves in genuine dialogue may be difficult to establish for various reasons, including limitation on time needed to build trust and the difficulty of overcoming power differentials within the group, such as an educator who has the power advantage of grading which in of itself might prevent individuals from honestly sharing their perspectives. Nonetheless, it became apparent from the findings that the same factors employed for effective dialogue facilitation as depicted in Figure 3 are still relevant and serve as a valuable illustration for educators interested in engaging learners across a broad spectrum of communication methods and can serve as a guide for facilitating meaningful conversations, discussions, debates or dialogues.

Dialogue Contributes to Transformational Learning for Facilitators

An additional and important conclusion of this this study seems to support that engaging in dialogues, including difficult dialogues across points of difference does contribute to transformed perspectives for interlocutors. Evinger (2014) notes that “little is known however about the experience of dialogue facilitators or the specific educational outcomes that occur for facilitators” (p. 129) but from this study many of the participants shared how engaging in the dialogue process has been transformational for them personally. Most reported that engaging in and facilitating dialogues, particularly with others who held different points of view, helped them explore and examine their own

assumptions, beliefs, and values more deeply and provided them opportunities for self-reflection and enhanced learning. The study found that dialogue helps individuals gain new insights because it is a method that allows for the exploration of thoughts and ideas in the hopes of elevating understanding while remaining respectful of the humanity and dignity of others despite differences which might emerge (Buber, 1970; Bohm, 1996; Freire, 1998; Isaacs, 1999; Muldoon, 1996; Schirch & David, 2007; Yankelovich, 1999).

Sam shared that, “It seems that political polarization grows every year as we isolate ourselves from both the people and ideas we don’t like and seek to associate solely with others who think and act like us”. However, learning environments often bring people together who may never have met elsewhere and, therefore, offers a diversity of perspectives that can be shared in a public forum to enhance learning. The learning environment provides a space and opportunity to explore ideas, perspectives, and viewpoints, including opposing views. As explained by Schirch and Camp (2007), “Dialogue helps people generate their own new collective understanding of a situation through exchanges between participants (p. 7). The process of dialogue is exploratory and allows for a space where “a group of people can explore the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings that subtly control their interactions” (Bohm, Factor, & Garret, 1991). It provides an understanding that we all come from different backgrounds and we all have different insights and it is dialogue that helps us learn about ourselves, each other, and the world.

Further, it appeared from the research that often reflection, particularly self-reflection or critical reflection over what was shared during the course of dialogue appeared to contribute greatly to enhanced learning and transformed perspectives for

participants. Most of the study participants shared that engaging in dialogue and actively listening to others share their own personal narratives allowed for new perspectives and transformational learning experiences. Some even described what Mezirow (1990) called a “disorienting dilemma” where they were confronted by contrary perspectives that led them to critically reflect upon preexisting opinions, thoughts, and/or beliefs which in light of new and counter information led some to “transform old ways of thinking , and act on new perspectives” (Braman, 1998, p. 31).

Dialogue Contributes to Constructive Transformation of Conflict

Bohm (1996) emphasized that dialogue is a “stream of meaning flowing among, through and between us, in the whole group, out of which may emerge some new form of understanding or shared meaning” (p.6) and believed that it is a needed form of communication in a world where aggression and violence appears to be increasing rather than mutual understanding and dialogue. This study showed that conflict resolution, diplomacy, and peacebuilding educators and practitioners often introduce individuals to the practice of dialogue so that people are able to understand conflict more deeply and manage conflict in more constructive ways. The ability to effectively dialogue is considered to be both a conflict resolution skill and an interpersonal skill which is vitally important in transforming conflicts into constructive moments of learning and opportunities to enact positive change. Through the practice of dialogue individuals are better able to understand others and overcome polarization. Dialogue is a skill that assists individuals with understanding and interacting productively with hostile people, assists with bringing people together in order to work collaboratively on accomplishing goals, and has effectively been utilized in resolving all level of interpersonal and

international disputes.

Recommendations

The findings of this study support the value of incorporating and practicing dialogue in the learning environment. As a result, I have outlined some recommendations for practice and further research on the subject of facilitating dialogues in the learning environment. The recommendations outlined here are by no means exhaustive, but reflect what I believe readers interested in facilitating dialogues, including difficult dialogues, might consider in their effort to improve dialogue facilitation in the learning environment.

Recommendations for Practice

Emerging from the research findings, the recommendations for practice serve as a practical guidance for educators interested in facilitating dialogues in the learning environment. Key strategies for enhancing dialogue include establishing the conditions depicted in Figure 3 and explained in this chapter and include raising participant understanding of dialogue, cultivating facilitator skills, and creating a conducive environment for dialogue to take place. Given the increasing diversity and the fact that older, more experienced adults possess among themselves a vast wealth of knowledge and experiences, it seems reasonable to assume that they would benefit from educational approaches that capitalize on their experiences and encourage their active participation in developing new ways of understanding (Brookfield, 1990). As a result, educators are asked to find ways to incorporate and practice dialogue in the learning environment and consider the conditions for effective dialogue illustration as a reference point in educator development and instructional practice programs in order to discuss the importance of

incorporating dialogue in the learning process. Additionally, professional development programs should include opportunities for educators to learn about dialogue and to share their own experiences with difficult dialogues. Professional development programs should also include critical incident reflections that invite educators to share ways they have practiced dialogue and continue to learn through practice how to facilitate dialogues, particularly those concerning conflict laden topics.

A significant finding from this research was that the majority of the research participants in this study have been introduced to the concept of dialogue and formally trained on the practice and facilitation of dialogue. It is important that educators interested in facilitating dialogues receive training and practice on utilizing dialogue skills so they too are prepared to use them in the learning environment. They are initially prepared to enter into and facilitate dialogues but share that it is practice engaging in dialogues that improves an individual's ability to effectively facilitate dialogue. Many of the study participants also shared that they remain careful in working to find formal and informal learning opportunities that enhance their ability to facilitate dialogue.

Recommendations for Future Research

I would like to propose several recommendations for future research of this topic. First, the research study focused on the perspective s of educators who work in the fields of conflict resolution, diplomacy, and/or peacebuilding, with the expectation that practitioners in these fields would be likely to have experience engaging in dialogue, and in particular with difficult dialogues among other adult education practitioners. Other perspectives from other disciplines could certainly be explored as a way to develop a better understanding of the practice of dialogue facilitation. Additionally, a review of the

literature illustrates that there exists a great deal of literature in regards to the educational outcomes for participants who engage in dialogue “including conflict resolution, intercultural understanding, multicultural competency, furtherance of democratic goals, and perspective taking” (Evinger, 2014, p. 132). However, “specific outcomes have not been defined for dialogue facilitators” (p.132). Future studies could certainly explore more fully the educational outcomes, including transformational learning, experienced by other dialogue facilitators outside of those included in this study.

Additionally, future research should be conducted that incorporates intensive, long term engagement with participants including observation of the dialogue process. One approach for future study might be to engage in more long term observation of participants engaged in the dialogue process where the researcher can witness over an extended period of time, how participants actually facilitate and engage in dialogue. Spending time observing participants engaged in dialogue would “provide more complete data” and “enables you to check and confirm your observations and inferences” (Maxwell, 2013, p.126), thereby, affording the researcher greater ability to better triangulate data collected from interviews with observation data.

Finally, interviewing participants about their perspectives pertaining to a particular topic before they engaged in a dialogue and then asking them again about that topic after the dialogue would also be beneficial for future research. By comparing what perspectives participants held prior to a dialogue with what perspectives they held after a dialogue researchers might better illustrate what participants learned after engaging in dialogue and in what way(s), if any, they might have been transformed by the experience. This could be done by asking participants immediately after the dialogue and again in

several weeks after participants had more time to reflect on the experience.

Concluding Thoughts

The journey of writing this dissertation has been incredibly rewarding and enlightening for me. I began this research journey with an interest in learning about new ideas and tools that could contribute to helping people across a broad spectrum interact more peacefully in an ever increasingly interconnected world. I began with an assumption that there had to be some way, some topic that might assist in contributing to constructive ways of resolving difference or disputes. As a former political scientist, a military trainer, and an adult educator I have been concerned about what I perceive to be a growing social polarization where all too often, the tendency to be right or to quickly defend beliefs and value systems seem to be fueling increased tensions, divides, and violence. I became increasingly concerned that although there appeared to be a great deal of talking and sharing of opinions, it seemed that across the social spectrum, adversity, conflict, and violence was worsening. As noted by Bohm, Factor, & Garrett (1991),

In our modern culture men and women are able to interact with one another in many ways: they can sing and dance or play together with little difficulty but their ability to talk together about subjects that matter deeply to them seems invariably to lead to dispute, division and often violence.

I felt that the continuing reproduction of the “us against them” construction or the “blame game” so regularly shared in public discourses and within learning environments is counter-productive to the pursuit of compassionate and mutually beneficial resolutions among people. I continued to be concerned that an “us against them” construction only ensures continued conflict as each side stands in defense of their position, posturing only

to defend against the attack and/or blame levied at them; preventing either side from truly hearing the other's perspective.

If Tannen (1998) was accurate in her assertion that "Contentious public discourse become a model for behavior and sets the tone for how individuals experience their relationships to other people and to the society we live in" (p. 280), I began to wonder how educators might instead model and encourage individuals to engage in conversations with others respectfully and with a willingness to consider other perspectives. How might we turn controversial topics into meaningful discussions for learning that both enhance learning and cultivate tolerance and respect for different beliefs including unpopular beliefs or views so that learners are better equipped when they leave the learning environment to constructively address issues they encounter throughout their lives? Ultimately, after much preliminary research, I came across the topic of dialogue; not dialogue in the way it is often used as a synonym by people to describe a conversation or discussion, but as a distinct communication process that often employs the use of a facilitator and seeks simply to increase mutual understanding among individuals possessing diverse perspectives.

From this study I learned that conflict resolution, diplomacy, and peacebuilding educators and practitioners often introduce individuals to the practice of dialogue so that people are able to understand conflict more deeply and manage conflict in more constructive ways. I immediately recognized that dialogue is also an important tool in education as the majority of learning and teaching theories subscribe to some form of dialogue (Avoseh, 2005). Prior to this research I thought I understood the meaning of dialogue, after all, it is a word commonly used among individuals and within public

discourses. However, I quickly discovered that I really did not understand it at all nor have there been many occasions in my life where I have had the opportunity to engage with others possessing differing points of view where we attempted purely to listen and understand one another's points of view instead of trying to convince, persuade or argue points of difference. In fact, my work on this research and my engagement with the participants in this study led me to reflect on how I engage with others and how my new understanding of dialogue has changed how I hope to interact with others in the future. I reflected on the words of Tannen (1998) who asserted that "it is as we pass through our country's educational system that the seeds of our adversarial culture are planted" (p.257). Prior to the pursuit of my doctorate in adult education, I recognized that the majority of my academic career had not formally educated nor really introduced me to the practice of dialogue, but rather intellectual debate whereby I have been expected to be able to debate and defend what I believe I have learned and what I think I "know". It is not lost upon me, that as I sit and write this dissertation, that I will inevitably be expected to "defend" what I have written here as the defense of a dissertation is steeped in the tradition of Western education. I certainly do not intend to imply that the debate of ideas is not an important or even a valuable component in education, it is valuable, and certainly has an important place in intellectual development. I mention this point simply to highlight that I feel, after many years of formal education that I am prepared to defend, even debate, what I have written here; however, my journey in discovering and practicing the skill of listening, simply with the purpose of trying to understand has only just begun for me and that I would very much like to have had greater opportunities to practice dialogue in the various learning environments I have found myself in throughout the

years.

So much of what the participants shared about how engaging in the dialogue process resonated with me, particularly, what Lisa shared about how she used to enjoy debating, that winning the intellectual argument was somehow gratifying but now, after engaging in dialogue, winning is just not that important anymore. I have discovered that practicing many of the skill of dialogue, including listening more than talking, has been so much more educational and gratifying for me. Instead of defending what I think I “know” I am learning more about what others “know” and how they see the world. This has allowed me to learn so much more because now I learn not only from my own experiences, but from others’ experiences as well which has served only to broaden my perspectives and deepen my understanding of various issues. I am now more inclined to temporarily suspend my pre-existing beliefs and actively listen to what others believe and why which helps me reflect more fully on ideas and topics later.

Through capturing the lived experiences of these seven educators in facilitating dialogues, it seems that what is of upmost importance to them is helping cultivate understanding among people. As an adult educator, I am committed to the education of adults and to incorporating teaching modalities that assist learners with greater interpersonal skill development that will help them long after they leave the learning environment. Merriam and Caffarella (2007) note that adult learning models focus on the adult in the context of his or her life, suggesting that learning is most effective when the learner is able to draw upon personal experiences when engaging in the learning process. Accordingly, I look forward to continuing to develop a greater understanding of dialogue and cultivating important skills necessary for its facilitation in the learning environment

so that learners are provided more opportunities to engage in the practice of dialogue in a “safe” space where they can share personal stories, self-reflect and develop deeper understandings of themselves, and think more critically about how they interact and connect with the world around them.

APPENDIX SECTION

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

To: Potential Research Participant
From: Vanessa Terrell
Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Dialogue and Difference: Facilitating Difficult Dialogues in the Learning Environment

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been declared exempt by the Texas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Purpose of this research:

I hope you will consider participating in this research study which is intended to find out how experienced conflict resolution educators facilitate and constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference in order to identify the factors that contribute to effective engagement in the dialogue process, as well as demonstrate dialogue's potential to assist interlocutors in questioning constructions that may lend themselves to transformational perspectives.

Criteria for participation:

Individuals selected for participation in this project will be purposefully selected from various conflict resolution programs across the Washington D.C. metro area who educate and engage adults in and through the practice of dialogue across differences of age, gender, race, language, religion, culture, political orientation, and/or other conflictual topics and:

1. Have facilitated dialogues for three years or more in various adult learning environments including the community college classroom, the university, the community, and/or the workplace;
2. Have facilitated dialogues using a face-to face format;
3. Have facilitated/engaged with what might be considered difficult dialogues.

If you volunteer to participate, you:

1. Will be interviewed individually (in person, via SKYPE, or by phone; estimated time 60-90 minutes);
2. Will be invited to complete a critical incident reflection detailing one specific incident that illuminates your experiences with facilitating difficult discourses across difference in the learning environment.
3. Will be contacted for a brief (30-45 minute) follow-up interview.

Assurance of confidentiality: Participants will not be personally identified in transcripts of interviews or in any future presentations or publications sharing findings from this project.

Voluntary nature of participation:

- Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- You may withdraw from the research at any time.

Anticipated value of the findings:

Educators are often called upon to manage difficult discourses which may arise in diverse learning environments; however, facilitating difficult dialogues is often a daunting and difficult endeavor for many educators with few published studies focused exclusively on instructor experiences facilitating difficult dialogues. Gaining such an understanding is important in helping educators recognize that difficult dialogues do not need to be avoided, but instead offer important opportunities for increased learning.

If you are interested in participating or have questions about the research: Please reply to Vanessa Terrell at vl1019@txstate.edu or 254.238.2703.

This project 2017287 was approved by the Texas State IRB January 2, 2017. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413 - lasser@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB administrator (512-245-2314 – meg201@txstate.edu).

Questions about this project should be addressed to Vanessa Terrell, vl1019@txstate.edu.

**APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN
RESEARCH STUDY
INFORMED CONSENT**

Study Title: Dialogue and Difference: Facilitating Difficult Dialogues in the Learning Environment

Principal Investigator: Vanessa Terrell
Sponsor: Texas State University

**Co-Investigator/
Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Jovita Ross-Gordon

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Purpose of this research:

The purpose of this qualitative case study research is to find out how experienced conflict resolution educators facilitate and constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference in order to identify the factors that contribute to effective engagement in the dialogue process, as well as demonstrate dialogue's potential to assist interlocutors in questioning constructions that may lend themselves to transformational perspectives. You are being asked to participate because you have been identified as a conflict resolution educator who educates and engages adults in and through the practice of dialogue across differences of age, gender, race, religion, culture, political orientation, and/or other conflictual topics and:

1. Have facilitated dialogues for three years or more in various adult learning environments including the community college classroom, the university, the community, and/or the workplace;
2. Have facilitated dialogues using a face-to face format;
3. Have facilitated/engaged with what might be considered difficult dialogues.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in the following:

- One 60-90 minute audio recorded interview conducted in person or via SKYPE which will be conducted at a time a place agreed upon by both the participant and researcher and will consist of questions pertaining to the experience of facilitating difficult dialogues across difference.
- One audio recorded 30-45 minute follow-up interview.

- Completion of a critical incident reflection detailing one specific incident that illuminates your experiences facilitating difficult discourses in the learning environment.

Anticipated risks of participation in the research:

Given the focus of the project concerning how you have facilitated difficult discourses overtime, your level of experience in doing so – and your willingness to reflect critically on your experiences , there are no anticipated risks of psychological harm, other than the potential minimal risk of some possible discomfort in recalling negative classroom experiences. You may refuse to answer any questions if you do not feel comfortable providing an answer.

Anticipated benefits of the research:

Educators are often called upon to manage difficult discourses which may arise in diverse learning environments; however, facilitating difficult dialogues is often a daunting and difficult endeavor for many educators with few published studies focused exclusively on instructor experiences facilitating difficult dialogues. Gaining such an understanding is important in helping educators recognize that difficult dialogues do not need to be avoided, but instead offer important opportunities for increased learning.

Extent of confidentiality:

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

Payment/Compensation

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Participation is Voluntary:

In the unlikely event that some of the survey or interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Vanessa Terrell, via email at VL1019@txstate.edu or by telephone at (254) 238-2703. This project 2017287 was approved by the Texas State IRB on January 2, 2017.

Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413; lasser@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager (512-245-2314; meg201@txstate.edu).

Statement of Consent:

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Participant Signature	Printed Name	Date
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Researcher Signature	Printed Name	Date
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If the interview was not conducted in person, you may return the signed consent as a PDF attachment via email or mail directly to me as the key researcher at: 1330 S. Fair Street Apt 919, Arlington, Virginia, 22202.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Time Interview Began_____

Time Interview Ended_____

Location of Interview_____

Date of Interview _____

Thank you for meeting with me today. The overall purpose of this research study is to explore how conflict resolution educators constructively engage adults in difficult dialogues across difference...

- Can you begin by telling me a bit about the nature of your work in facilitating dialogue?
- Can you tell me about some of the issues you have facilitated dialogues over?
- Without referring to specific persons by name, can you give me an idea of some of the types of individuals (or groups) you have brought together for a dialogue process?
- How long have you been doing this work?

RQ I. What factors do experienced conflict resolution and peace building educators perceive as contributing to effective engagement in the dialogue process?

1. How would you describe the dialogue process to someone unfamiliar with it?
2. What factors and/or skills do you believe are important to the dialogue process?
3. What benefits do you see in being able to help people engage in the practice of dialogue?
 - Why do you believe the ability to engage in constructive dialogue is an important ability to have?
4. What factors have influenced your perspective regarding dialogue?

5. What have you found to be most helpful in preparing adults to engage in difficult dialogues across difference?
6. In what ways have you developed and/or further developed your own dialogue skills as you engage in the practice of facilitating difficult dialogues?
7. Under what conditions do you believe genuine dialogue is most likely to occur?
 - In what way(s) are dialogues enabled/sustained in the learning environment?

RQ II. How do educators involved within a dialogue pertaining to conflictual content and diverse perspectives manage emotions, their own and those of others, when they emerge?

1. What are some of the greatest challenges you have experienced while engaging in or facilitating a dialogue?
 - How have you handled some of these challenges?
2. In what ways have you managed difficult emotions you may have experienced while facilitating a difficult dialogue?
 - The difficult emotions of others?
3. What are some ways you think a facilitator can create a "sense of safety" during a difficult dialogue?
 - What about when there are differences in status or power among participants?
 - Are there ways power relations issues managed?

RQ III. What, if any, indications are there that the process of engaging in difficult

dialogues across points of difference contributes to transformed perspectives?

1. How has your understanding of the dialogue process changed from when you initially started doing this work? Please describe.
2. What are some of the things you think you have learned from your experiences engaging with dialogue? [Prompt: Can you think of a specific example of learning?]
3. In what ways do you believe that facilitating the dialogue process has transformed your own ways of thinking and doing, or how you yourself engage in dialogue with others?
4. Can you give an example of similar transformations you have witnessed among those you have worked with?

Is there anything I didn't ask you during the interview that you think is important to share with me today?

Thank you for your time and participation.

APPENDIX D: CRITICAL INCIDENT REFLECTION

As an extension of our first interview, I would like you to please take some time to reflect, in writing, on an incident that stands out in your memory as the most – or one of the most difficult dialogues you have facilitated?

After reflecting, please take some time to describe the situation, how you handled it, and how you felt.

In your reflection, you might consider discussing the following:

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- What factors you believe may have contributed to this dialogue being particularly difficult (personal, cultural, institutional factors, etc.)?
- How you facilitated the dialogue process?
- How you felt in the situation?
- What emotions you might have experienced?
- How you managed those emotions?
- What kinds of emotions others seemed to be experiencing?
- How you responded to those emotions?
- What you learned from this experience?

In reflecting on the situation later, is there anything you would do differently in facilitating this difficult dialogue?

How do you believe you were impacted either personally and/or professionally by this experience?

How has this experience influenced the way you now engage in difficult dialogues?

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