This next reading is a little difficult, partly because it’s taken from a longer article that was published in a scholarly journal. So its intended audience was professors, not students. But I put it in this chapter because it says so may important things about dialogue. And, since its authors are two really good teachers who give several examples from their classes, I think that if you bear with them and invest some effort, you’ll find that they make what they’re saying pretty clear.

Bruce and Jeff start by noting that “dialogue” means different things to different people and that they are going to distinguish between “Dialogue1” and “Dialogue2.” The first meaning of “dialogue” is non-polarized discourse, genuinely collaborative conversation. The second meaning of “dialogue” is “a relational space,” a way of being with another characterized by “openness, trust, presence, and an understanding of the other that arises not from psychological compatibility but from shared humanity.” This second kind of dialogue usually happens only in moments, brief events of human meeting. You can teach Dialogue1, but Dialogue2 is elusive, because no set of steps guarantees that it will happen. Yet, the two are definitely connected, because people who learn to engage in non-polarized discourse often increase the amount of Dialogue2 in their lives.

The center section of this reading outlines Bruce’s and Jeff’s approach to teaching dialogue. Since it’s not possible to lay out a series of steps, even for Dialogue1, they start by working with their students to “distinguish dialogue as a possibility” in communication. Their discussion of what it means to “distinguish dialogue” or to “get a distinction” is one of the most important and potentially most difficult parts of this reading. I won’t repeat what they say here, but I encourage you to read this section more than once. The main idea is to learn that dialogue—starting with the first meaning but eventually including the second one—is a concrete possibility in many of your everyday communication experiences. And in order to make dialogue a living possibility, it helps to get your head around three understandings that have to do with “language, identity, and presence.”

The first of these is discussed in a section titled “Language as Constitutive of the World.” The central point here is the idea that most of our realities—the “worlds” we inhabit—are built in our communicating—the ways we talk and listen. You’ve heard this idea before in Chapters 1, 2, and 4 of Bridges Not Walls. Here Bruce and Jeff emphasize that, when you understand that “language” means not just words but “the understanding of things that accompanies the words,” you can begin to see that your language permits you to understand whatever you’d call “real” or a part of your “world.” So, for example, Napoleon did not have an “ego” (“ego” was not part of his world), because the notion “ego” was invented by Freud, who lived after Napoleon died. Without the way of understanding that accompanies the term, “ego,” nobody could have an “ego” in their world at the time of Napoleon (or before). The “thing” came about with Freud’s ways of talking. After this word and related ones were invented, then the thing could be a part of someone’s world. For the same reason, gravity didn’t exist in the world before Newton. He “invented” it. Importantly, Newton did not simply label a force that was already in the world; he formed our understanding of the force with his ways of talking. The reason this is important is that the language in which dialogue is understood and practiced literally makes it a possibility. In other words, you need to understand and speak in certain ways in order to make dialogue a possibility in your life.
The next subsection is about identity, and it's probably easier to understand but harder to apply. Bruce and Jeff begin by noting that the single greatest barrier to dialogue "is the pervasive human impulse to defend one's identity from any perceived threat." Dialogue breaks down most often, in other words, when people get defensive (remember Gibb's essay in Chapter 9). Dialogue definitely does not require that you eliminate every bit of defensiveness, or that you give up your values and beliefs and agree with every conversation partner. But it does require that you differentiate between "being right" and "being committed." Echoing some of the readings in Chapter 3 of Bridges Not Walls, Bruce and Jeff explain how, consciously and unconsciously, people engage with others in various ways to construct identities, and then we struggle to defend them as if they were "given" rather than actually constructed or "invented." Everybody operates this way so defensiveness is not a psychological weakness but a part of what it means to be human. This means that the goal is not to eliminate this part of what makes you human, but, as Bruce and Jeff put it, is to "give up taking [your] own defensiveness personally." You grant the existence of defensiveness as inevitable so you can move beyond it to "identify with the whole of the conversation, rather than my piece of it."

"Presence" is the third idea that needs to be understood in order to distinguish dialogue as a possibility. Bruce and Jeff explain that it's impossible, again, to prescribe a series of steps to guarantee that people are present to each other, so the teacher of dialogue instead has to "create the possibility of actually being present." They conclude this section, "In a moment of pure, naked presence, there are only you and I as possibilities, and the possibility of the human relationship, a blank canvas upon which to create. An inquiry into presence is an important aspect of preparation for dialogue."

Again, these are not simple ideas. And they are important. I encourage you to invest some time and effort in appropriating them. Read these pages slowly, read them more than once, discuss them with classmates, jot down questions you have, participate in the discussion in class. If you want, look again at what I've written in Chapters 1 and 2, and what Martin Buber writes in the final chapter of this book. I really believe your efforts will be rewarded.

Can Dialogue be Taught?
Bruce Hyde and Jeffery L. Bineham

Although communication departments in this country regularly offer courses in persuasion and argumentation, courses in dialogue are rare. This is not surprising, Dialogue, as a discourse form, is characterized by a commitment to openness and indeterminacy, making precise formulation or pedagogical explication problematic. Further, practitioners and theorists of dialogue often differ widely on their definitions of the term. Cissna and Anderson, in the first chapter of their 1994 volume The Reach of Dialogue (edited with Arnett), have traced the traditions of dialogue presented in the works of Buber, Bakhtin, Gadamer and others. Dialogue in these traditions is variously conceptualized as a type of relationship, a form of communication, a framework for knowledge creation, an interaction between interpreter and text, or a characteristic of language itself (Cissna & Anderson, 1994, pp. 10-13). Particularly in the work of Buber, whom Stewart has called "the one author who initially did the most to describe dialogue and attempt to place it at the center of the human studies" (1994, p. ix), dialogue is ultimately seen as a way of being with another person. In current popular usage, on the other hand—including, for example, President Clinton's recent call for a "national dialogue on race"—what is being referred to is clearly a way of talking with others.

In considering the possibility of teaching dialogue, we will borrow from O'Keefe the idea of subscript use, so that we may differentiate between two phenomena which we will refer to as dialogue, and dialogue.

Dialogue, indicates a form of discourse. Specifically, dialogue, is non-polarized discourse. Its dynamic is not oppositional, but collaborative. Its proposed outcome is not the ascendance of one perspective over another, but the fusion of all perspectives to enable a larger, more inclusive view, one which allows the tension of disagreement. From within this common understanding, resolutions may be created that could not have been foreseen from any partial view, participants in dialogue, may make arguments—that is, they may make claims and support these claims with reasons—but in a dialogic context these claims are included rather than rebutted, and are explored for areas of commonality rather than points of clash. Rigorously collaborative, dialogue, is the potential wellsprings of what Bohm calls "social intelligence" (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1991). Such conversation generates new possibilities in communities and organizations by fostering collective thinking.

Dialogue, is a relational space. This is the ontological aspect of dialogue, the dialogic way of being with another person. It is referred to variously by Buber (1987, 1988) as the between, the interhuman, and the I-Thou. Dialogue, is a manifestation of that state of ontological human relatedness that Martin Heidegger calls Being-with (1962, pp. 153-157). It is characterized by openness, trust, presence, and an understanding of the other that arises not from psychological compatibility but from shared humanity. As Cissna and Anderson (1998) have suggested, this way of being may manifest as "an extended state of high quality mutuality," or it may consist of "dialogic moments"—important yet ephemeral moments of human meeting" (p. 63). Dialogue, however fleeting, is ultimately the heart of dialogue.

With regard to a pedagogy of dialogue, our experience is that a communication class can reliably and consistently provide students with an important experience of dialogue,—an experience that will reveal to them both...
limitations that polarized discourse imposes upon our ability to deal effectively with problematic social issues, and the possibilities that dialogue affords for addressing such issues. In our view, dialogue is a much-needed practice in our culture, and the development of a pedagogy which can produce it is a highly addressed such issues. In our view, dialogue is a much-needed practice in our we—speech communication educators—are the people to do it.

Dialogue, on the other hand, is elusive. According to Buber, it comes by grace (1987, p. 11). It is not subject to pedagogical formalization, and cannot be promised in a course syllabus. Therefore we emphasize that the insights of dialogue, may be attained fully, whether or not they are accompanied by an experience of dialogue. We cannot guarantee our students an I-Thou relationship with their classmates; but we can show them how to avoid the frustrations of polarized argument, and thus we can begin the important work of transforming our culture’s public discourse.

At the same time, we must note that the relationship between dialogue, and dialogue, is a subtle one. The practice of new forms of discourse will inevitably affect our nature as communicative beings. Thus the practice of dialogic communication often generates transformative experiences of dialogic relatedness and mutuality. Students in our classes frequently remark on the sense of authentic relatedness that characterizes their dialogue sessions. They begin by learning how to engage in a nonpolarized conversation, but may end by being more open and trusting with each other. Thus, although the goal in our classes is primarily a pragmatic pedagogy of dialogue as a discourse form, as educators we remain always open to moments of dialogue, and invite them whenever and however we can. Their possibility makes a dialogue classroom a potentially extraordinary educational environment.

ELEMENTS OF A TEACHING APPROACH TO DIALOGUE

The essential particulars of dialogue cannot be formalized. The pedagogical approach that we have taken, therefore, is to distinguish dialogue as a possibility in discourse. This approach draws on the work of Landmark Education, an organization whose educational methodology has been the subject of considerable research by Hyde (1990, 1992, 1994, 1995). Landmark's pedagogy is based in the dialogic development of distinctions. According to Steve Zaffron of Landmark:

> Getting a distinction is like what happens as you learn to ski. When you first stand at the top of a slope and look down all you see is a lot of snow and a really steep drop-off. As you practice and become more expert, you begin to be able to see differences between one slope and another. Standing at the top of a slope you see moguls and other subtle variations in the terrain that make for easier or more difficult paths down the mountain. In addition, the mountain no longer seems steep. These characteristics of the mountain were always there, but before you just didn’t see them. That’s what getting a distinction does. (Wruck & Eastley, 1997, p. 8)

From this perspective, it can be said that the possibility of dialogue exists in many conversational encounters, but has not been distinguished for most of us. Our cultural predisposition is to listen for opportunities to agree or disagree, not to engage in dialogue.

In Zaffron’s example above, practice in skiing is a process of developing distinctions. Coursework in dialogue has the same purpose. The goal is not to learn concepts, but to distinguish the possibility of dialogue in interaction. For the trained skier, a trip down the mountain does not involve applying information that he or she has learned. Rather, the training has altered the world of the skier so that the mountain occurs as skiable. Coursework in dialogue is likewise designed to alter the participant’s world so that conversations occur naturally as openings for dialogue.

Distinctions differ from concepts. One understands concepts, but one dwells in distinctions; they transform one’s reality. For example, conditions for much of humanity have been transformed by the introduction into the world, at some point in history, of human rights. This transformation has occurred, not because we understand the concept of human rights, but because we dwell in the distinction. For most of us, our world is such that human beings simply occur for us as beings with rights, and we respond appropriately.

Distinctions also differ from definitions. Definitions provide limits; distinctions generate possibilities. For example, at one point during his term as U.S. president, Jimmy Carter convened a World Conference on the family. It drew an international body of participants, all of whom had demonstrated in their countries a commitment to family issues. But the conference failed to accomplish its first order of business, which was to agree on a definition of "family." This failure is not entirely surprising; within our own culture, we struggle as new forms of family—single-parent, extended, gay/lesbian—contend for inclusion within our model. "Family" is not, at this point, easily defined. But participants at Carter’s conference, despite their cultural differences, had certainly distinguished family; their backgrounds demonstrated active commitment to the possibility indicated by that term. They did not, however, recognize the difference between distinction and definition. Therefore they remained stuck in a struggle at the level of definition. Rather than exploring the range of definitions that could be generated from the distinction ‘family,’ they felt constrained to seek a specific definition of "family.” The focus made salient their differences rather than their mutual understanding.

Consider another example: art as a distinction. From early in life, we begin to receive hints about the nature of art. Generally our first conceptualization of art, learned in elementary school, is drawing and painting. Later we learn that sculpture, music, and literature may be art, and that there are also performing arts and even culinary arts. Over the years, we read and think about art, and stand or sit in the presence of many works of art. As a result of these experiences,
Language as Constitutive of the World

To those in the discipline of speech communication, the notion that language is not merely representational, but provides the world with its meaning, is not a new one (see, for example, Bineham, 1995; Brummett, 1976; Deetz, 1973; Scott, 1967; Stewart, 1995). But we suggest that while many of us understand this theory, far fewer of us live it. In large part, most human beings are commonsense Cartesians. We spend much of our lives struggling with the way things "are," rather than savoring the malleability that a constitutive view of language, fully distinguished, might lend our world. The aim of a classroom conversation on this topic, then, is that students begin to dwell in the possibility of such a view, and not merely understand the theory. To gain access to the generative nature of dialogue, one must be open to the power of language to create meanings.

In our experience, one of the most difficult points for students to grasp here is that "language" does not refer merely to words, but to the understanding of things that accompany the words. For those in our society, for example, the word "chair" calls forth an understanding of the nature and function of chairs. In other cultures, other words (e.g., chaise) evoke a similar understanding. But imagine a culture where there were no chairs—a culture where people stood, or sat on the ground, and whose language, and corresponding understanding of the world, did not include chairs. If someone from such a culture encountered an object of the kind that we how as a chair, that object would not occur for him or her as a chair. Thus chair-ness is not implicit in the object. Being-a-chair arises in language. Nor is language limited to words; to sit in the object is to language it as a chair. In the words of Einstein, "It seems that the human mind has first to construct forms independently before we can find them in things" (1954/1982, p. 266).

A useful example of the role of language in creating the world is found in Hellen Keller's autobiographical accounts of her early childhood (1908, 1955). Stricken at nineteen months by an illness which left her unable to see or hear, Keller was virtually without language and the understanding it makes possible. Writing of that period, she refers to herself as "Phantom," a "little being governed only by animal impulses. . . . Her few words wilted [and] silence swooped upon her mind and lay over all the space she traversed" (1955, pp. 37, 41). Thus we suggest to students that they eliminate the cartoon thought-balloon that they are accustomed to seeing above the head of Garfield and Snoopy, and imagining above the heads of their own pets. Nonhuman animals, says Freire, cannot set objectives, or commit themselves, or take risks, since all of these involve meaningful reflection. Nor do animals "have" emotions in the same way that human beings do; it is more accurate to say that animals are their feelings. Freire borrows Sartre's terminology to designate this difference: animals are "beings in themselves," whereas humans are "beings for themselves" (pp. 78-81). An example from Schudson (1997) is relevant: "Charles Darwin argued that every human expression of emotion except one has an analogue in other species. The distinctively human manifestation of emotion is blushing: Darwin explains that it is "the thinking what others think of us that makes us blush" (p. 302). Only humans, as beings for themselves, experience the reflexivity that gives rise to a blush.

These are challenging ideas for students to contemplate, especially because any understanding of the "inner lives" of nonhuman animals is, to some degree, speculative. But the empirical unresolvability of the matter is not an impediment to its pedagogical effectiveness. Ultimately, the point of this conversation is not to argue whether or not animals think, but to provoke students' active engagement with the question of language.

Thus, for pedagogical purposes, it is useful to state the matter provocatively. For example: Napoleon did not have an ego; the ego was invented by Freud, and wasn't available during Napoleon's lifetime. This idea violates students' common sense. Surely, they argue, the ego was always there. Freud simply discovered it and named it. But there is no ego. Ego, as well as the rest of the Freudian vocabulary, was created by Freud as a way of explaining his observations of human behavior. Subsequently, when human actions were observed through the lens of Freud's psychological distinctions, we were provided with a new understanding of our behavior, and consequently a new way of understanding,
and being, ourselves. We are not simply pre-Freudians with new labels. Since Freud, we have dwelt in a transformed self-understanding; and this is not because Freud “discovered” something “true” about human beings (many of Freud’s ideas are, of course, being challenged by contemporary theorists), but because he created a new language. This creative process was not arbitrary; Freud did not simply “make things up.” His vocabulary fit what we saw, and illuminated it. As a result, members of our culture have for years been matter-of-fact Freudians, assuming unthinkingly that the ego is as solid a piece of the human equipment as the head or the hands, and that it always has been.

A final idea to provoke student thinking about language: Newton invented gravity; prior to Newton, gravity did not exist in the world. Students, of course, protest this statement vehemently; but they can be led at that point to consider that Newton did not merely label or explain an already existing phenomenon. Certainly there was, before Newton, a physical force; but Newton transformed the possibility of that force. Here is Heidegger's challenging statement regarding the nature of Newton's thought:

Before Newton's laws were discovered, they were not "true": it does not follow that they were false.... Just as little does this "restriction" imply that the Being-true of "truths" has in any way been diminished. To say that before Newton his laws were neither true nor false, cannot signify that before him there were no such entities as have been uncovered and pointed out by these laws. Through Newton the laws became true and with them, entities became accessible in themselves to [human beings]. Once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which beforehand already were. Such uncovering is & kind of being which belongs to "truth." (1962, p. 269)

Thus, just as Freud observed human behavior, Newton observed the physical universe; and just as Freud invented a vocabulary that made phenomena accessible in a new way, transforming our understanding of ourselves, so Newton invented a new way of understanding the universe. In doing so, he expanded our world. This is the central point: a Newtonian universe is not simply the old universe with new labels. The possibilities for existence have been transformed by the new truths brought forth by the new language.

Human beings can inhabit only the world that has been distinguished in language by human thinking. The languaged world is, for human beings, the real world. Thus, one thousand years ago, the earth was flat. We recognize now the limits of that understanding—just as our late-twentieth-century understanding will undoubtedly seem limited to those living millennia hence. But as Stewart has pointed out, human beings do not live in „ontological outer space“ (1995, p. 108). We inhabit the world given by human understanding in our time, and a thousand years ago, humans were given a flat surface. The earth became round when human thinking distinguished that possibility. And even that understanding of things may not be the “truth” of the matter, since physics continues to create new ways of seeing. Einstein’s statement on this point is a clear and eloquent pedagogical tool:

Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavor to understand reality, we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears its ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious, he may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he will never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his pictures with the real mechanism, and he cannot even imagine the possibility or the meaning of such a comparison. (Einstein & Infeld, 1938, p. 33)

Identity

Perhaps the single greatest barrier to dialogue is the pervasive human impulse to defend one’s identity—one’s self—and whatever one identifies with and as oneself—from any perceived threat. When dialogue breaks down, it is invariably due to someone’s holding tightly to the rightness of some position with which they identify themselves. Must we then suggest that participants in dialogue give up their values and beliefs in the interest of collaboration, and surrender their right to take a stand? Emphatically not. Instead, we find it valuable to differentiate between being right and being committed. Being right about one’s position on an issue makes other positions wrong; being committed to an authentic inquiry, on the other hand, gives room to engage productively with other points of view. Being right is a function of personal identity and its survival. Dialogue is the possibility of a commitment to something larger than one’s identity.

Recent inquiry into the source and nature of human identity has begun to “decenter” the human subject, the carrier of personal identity, from its traditional role as the arbiter of human action. We suggest that if the full possibility of dialogue is to be realized, students must be introduced into this decentering process, so that aspects of their identities—beliefs, values, assumptions—can be subjected to authentic questioning. Generating this decentering conversation is, perhaps, the ultimate challenge for a pedagogy of dialogue, in part because we live in a culture where, on all fronts, people are being encouraged to build stronger identities—personal, ethnic, cultural, and subcultural. Self-esteem, we are told, depends upon a robust identity. Yet, at the same time, the culture and the world grow increasingly fragmented and contentious at the boundaries of these stronger and ever more numerous identities.

But if dialogue is to be reached, the question must be raised: what is the origin and function of identity? What is a “self,” anyway? For the most part, unthinkingly, students assume that the personal pronoun “I” indicates a substantial entity of some kind that inhabits their body. It is vital, then, for them to consider that their body arrived on the scene before the “I” did, and that the “I” is, for the most part, their own creation. A human infant has no “I”—it has little or no sense of self, and no self-reflective awareness (Dinkmeyer, 1965, p. 188; Stern, 1985, p. 6). But as the infant’s inborn capacity for language and
belief, goals, interests, and historical events. Generally, we might say that this
world. The meanings of that world, and appropriate for living and surviving in such a
world begins to have meaning, one designs an identity that is harmonic with the
perceptions, the infant begins creating an identity for that perceiver, pri-
marily in response to early interactions with significant others. Thus, as one's
years in response to the situations and interactions we encounter as we live.

Further, the thrust of identity, once it exists, is to perpetuate itself. The situa-
tion is stated here in Heidegger's treatise on the thinking of Nietzsche:

That beings are—the "condition of preservation" for life—need not be thought
in such a way that beings are something constant, existing in and for themselves
"above" and beyond life. The only condition is that life instill of itself and in it-
self a belief in something it can constantly hold onto in all matters. . . . To be able
to be as life, life needs the constant fixity of a "belief," but this "belief" calls for
holding something to be constant and fixed, taking something as "in being."
(Heidegger, 1961/1991, p. 62)

What one holds onto, as the vehicle for existence, is personal identity—including
those elements of other identities (ethnic, national, etc.) that one has
incorporated into one's self. If "I" cease to exist, existence as I know it ceases;
and we are not making the obvious biological point here, but the ontological
one. For a self-reflective being, continuing existence is accomplished by main-
taining the validity of those meanings that constitute one's self.

Thus, our actions are driven largely by the survival needs of an invented
identity, a drive cloaked in meaning and significance, in the cause of which we
inflict massive suffering upon ourselves and others. This is not to say that we do
not, in the process, experience love and joy. But the context for these experiences,
and the cause they ultimately serve, is identity. To sacrifice for others—to trade
material rewards for the satisfactions of "selflessness"—is a move to a subtler
level of personal gratification. Although such sacrifice may greatly benefit others, self-interest is unavoidably imbedded in all our actions, even our best
ones. Further, to deny that this is so is to validate it, because such denial is itself
an act of self-interest.

Why is this point important? Why is it valuable for students of dialogue to
contemplate their inescapable self-concern? Because it allows the realization
that human defensiveness—the need to be right, the tendency to defend one's
position rather than open it to inquiry—is not a psychological phenomenon,
but an ontological one. Defensiveness is not the closed-minded impulse of an
individual personality. It is a manifestation of the nature of being; it is being
doing its thing, that is, continuing-to-be. Therefore, in the interest of distin-
guishing the possibility of dialogue, the goal of an inquiry into human identity
is to create the possibility that participants may give up taking their own de-
fensiveness personally. If one can recognize defensiveness as an inevitable as-
pect of human being, and can grant it being without feeling personally to blame
for it, there is a possibility beyond it. This is the beginning of responsibility as a
freedom, and a transformed relationship to identity. Heidegger proposed that an
authentic self is one that has broken through its concealments and disguises, and
has been "taken hold of" (1962, p. 167). If one can thus take hold of one's an-
tidotal tendencies—neither indulge nor resist them, but own them, allow
them, suspend them, observe them—one is no longer owned by them. One is
then nearer to an authentic embrace of one's own humanity, and an authentic
acceptance of the humanity of others.

Inquiry into the nature of identity is important in distinguishing dialogue
because, ultimately, the central question for a participant in dialogue is this: can
I identify with the whole of the conversation, rather than my piece of it? Can I stand in
a commitment to a larger possibility than my own position? Am I willing to con-
sider giving up a part of who I am, in the interest of what we might become?
Such willingness is more likely if one recognizes the constructedness of one's
identity.

One of the most important results that we have observed in our work with
dialogue is a particular shift in students' relation to their position on an issue. This
shift is away from "I hold this view because it is the right position," and to-
ward "I hold this view because of my background and experiences; my posi-
tion on this issue is the natural result of those experiences." More importantly,
this shift is accompanied by a corresponding move from "The person who holds
an opposing view to my own is wrong," toward "This person's opposing view
is a natural result of their background and experiences, and I understand why
they hold that view." We believe that this is the essential first step in achieving
dialogue. It does not mean that, at this point, the student changes his or her opin-
ion, but that she or he has reached the point of respectful understanding of the
other's perspective. This is the point from which authentic dialogue can begin.
This shift is achieved, we believe, by distinguishing the constructed nature of human
identity.

Presence

Finally, an idea that is central to dialogue as we understand it is the notion of
presence or presentness to the other. Here again, the conversation is challenging,
because the terrain is tricky and rich with paradox. Any definition or conceptu-
alization of presence cannot capture the phenomenon, because, if one is en-
gaged with a concept of presence, one is not present. To be present is to be in the
world at the moment, not "in one's head." So the challenge for a pedagogy of
dialogue is to design an inquiry whose aim is not to define or explain presence,
but to create the possibility of actually being present.
Buber's work, especially the opening sections of *I and Thou* (1958/1987), are particularly useful for generating this discussion. For the most part, according to Buber, we relate to the world through the filter of the past (an I-It relationship), who we know ourselves to be, and what we know about others, are products of the past. I how who you are because I know who you were; but this situation leads to objectification. In a state of pure presence, I would see you newly in each moment, unlimited by the strictures of my past experience. Such a state, however, is unimaginable, and would be untenable. In its pure form, a perpetual condition of presence would have us wondering each morning who the person in the mirror is, would rob us of the often valuable opportunity to learn from our experiences, and would leave us boggled in our attempts to navigate everyday existence. Therefore, as Buber makes eloquently clear, all presence must quickly devolve into past. Moments of presence, as soon as they are noticed, become memories or concepts of presence.

But it is valuable to think hard about what is meant here by a "moment." When we speak of a "moment of presence," we are not talking about an instantaneous point in clock-time. "The present is not fugitive and transient," says Buber, "but continually present and enduring" (1958/1987, p. 13). It is as if, when one is present, one is standing outside of clock-time. Presence expands time. In moments of presence, one senses that time may not be the rigid grid of seconds, minutes, and hours within whose confines we ordinarily exist. All of us have experienced such moments, when we were surprised during an event to discover, glancing at a clock, how much (or how little) time had passed. Our common-sense objectivist tendency in such moments is to credit clock time as valid, and to discount our own experience of lived time as a psychological aberration. But perhaps not. An inquiry into the possibility of time as a malleable phenomenon may be useful in distinguishing a dialogic way of being.

Presence is elusive, but it may be glimpsed, and moments of presence can be achieved. Although fleeting, such moments may prove transformative. The problems that prevent dialogue—all the personal, social, and cultural identity issues that divide us—are artifacts of the past. Racism is not present. In a moment of pure, naked presence, there are only you and I as possibilities, and the possibility of the human relationship, a blank canvas upon which to create. An inquiry into presence is an important aspect of preparation for dialogue.

**EPILOGUE**

In a recent essay on conversation and democracy, Schudson writes that "democratic talk" is essentially civil, oriented to problem-solving, public, and, because it involves diverse people and ideas, uncomfortable (298-299). The view of dialogue to which we are committed is consistent with Schudson's perspective. We are not interested here in a dialogue that consists of homogeneous social discourse and thus does not feature the need to address tough public problems about which people hold conflicting views. Our most practical goal is to develop the practice of dialogue as a complement to argument, especially argument as conceived by Johnstone. Our culture needs (and wants!) a critical mass of people who will resist the simplicity of polarized debate and embrace the possibility of public dialogue. The communication discipline is positioned well to address this need, and we hope our colleagues will join us in an effort to improve the quality of public talk about important issues.

This work should also produce some important theoretical outcomes. One conviction that underlies our work, for example, is that we should seek to operationalize our theoretical ideas about language as a constitutive force in human affairs. These ideas about language have a history in the philosophy and theory of communication (a short view might trace this history to the "rhetoric as epistemic" literature, a long view would trace it at least to Plato and the Sophists), and we want to tap into that history in order to suggest some practical applications of those ideas. In this paper we have done this by developing a way to teach dialogue premised specifically upon the idea that language is constitutive, and upon ideas related to the construction of identity and presence. Our focus is to develop the theory and practice of dialogue; but to do that also requires development of these related concepts, and so we hope our essay advances theoretical discussions about the connections among communication, identity, and presence.

The challenge before us is daunting and worthwhile. It is daunting because our most basic cultural assumptions encourage us to engage in bipolar argument and to defend our positions against any challenge. But it is worthwhile because we live in a time of pluralism and difference when many people recognize the need for a more productive type of discourse. If we, as communication educator-scholars, can teach dialogue effectively, we can illumine one route to that more productive public discussion.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Compare and contrast dialogue, and dialogue.
2. The authors explain what "getting a distinction" means with the help of an example from skiing. In your own words, explain what it means to "understand the mountain as skiable."
3. What's the relationship between a definition and a distinction?
4. "Language," as these authors use the term, does not just mean words. What does it mean?
5. Paraphrase: "Newton invented gravity; prior to Newton, gravity did not exist in the world."
6. Are Bruce and Jeff arguing that people should stop being defensive? Explain.
7. What can it possibly mean to say that "self...[is] fundamentally a conversation"?
8. Explain what you think it means to be "present to the presentness of the other."
PROBES

1. Dialogue; according to these authors, "comes by grace." "Grace" sounds like something you'd hear about at church. Explain Bruce and Jeff's point about communication here.
2. Consider what you've learned about public speaking, conflict management, or group discussion as knowledge of some relevant "distinctions." Explain what it means to learn to understand how a public speaking situation "unconceals new possibilities." Or describe how you have learned to understand a conflict as "manageable." Or describe how you can now "distinguish" group discussion.
3. Humans are able to think about ourselves and our thinking in ways that, so far as we now know, other animals don't. Provide some evidence that supports this claim. What evidence might dispute this claim (consider what we know about dolphins, whales, or chimps)?
4. Paraphrase, paying special attention to the italicized words: "Human beings can inhabit only the world that has been distinguished in language by human thinking."
5. Explain what it means to "identify with the whole of the conversation rather than my piece of it."
6. Although dialogue, (genuinely collaborative conversation) is not at all common, most of us have experienced it at one time or another, during a conversation with a friend, or even in a committee meeting or at work. Recall a time you experienced it. Then describe what effect that experience had—or could have had—on your experience of Dialogue.

REFERENCES

This next reading is a little difficult, partly because it's taken from a longer article that was published in a scholarly journal. So it's intended audience was professors, not students. But I put it in this chapter because it says so may important things about dialogue. And, since its authors are two really good teachers who give several examples from their classes, I think that if you bear with them and invest some effort, you'll find that they make what they're saying pretty clear.

Bruce and Jeff start by noting that "dialogue" means different things to different people and that they are going to distinguish between "Dialogue1," and dialogue2. The first meaning of "dialogue" is non-polarized discourse, genuinely collaborative conversation. The second meaning of "dialogue" is "a relational space," a way of being with another characterized by "openness, trust, presence, and an understanding of the other that arises not from psychological compatibility but from shared humanity." This second kind of dialogue usually happens only in moments, brief events of human meeting. You can teach Dialogue1, but Dialogue2 is elusive, because no set of steps guarantees that it will happen. Yet, the two are definitely connected, because people who learn to engage in non-polarized discourse often increase the amount of Dialogue2 in their lives.

The center section of this reading outlines Bruce's and Jeff's approach to teaching dialogue. Since it's not possible to lay out a series of steps, even for Dialogue1, they start by working with their students to "distinguish dialogue as a possibility" in communication. Their discussion of what it means to "distinguish dialogue" or to "get a distinction" is one of the most important and potentially most difficult parts of this reading. I won't repeat what they say here, but I encourage you to read this section more than once. The main idea is to learn that dialogue—starting with the first meaning but eventually including the second one—is a concrete possibility in many of your everyday communication experiences. And in order to make dialogue a living possibility, it helps to get your head around three understandings that have to do with "language, identity, and presence."

The first of these is discussed in a section titled "Language as Constitutive of the World." The central point here is the idea that most of our realities—the "worlds" we inhabit—are built in our communicating—the ways we talk and listen. You've heard this idea before in Chapters 1, 2, and 4 of Bridges Not Walls. Here Bruce and Jeff emphasize that, when you understand that "language" means not just words but "the understanding of things that accompanies the words," you can begin to see that your language permits you to understand whatever you'd call "real" or a part of your "world." So, for example, Napoleon did not have an "ego" ("ego" was not part of his world), because the notion "ego" was invented by Freud, who lived after Napoleon died. Without the way of understanding that accompanies the term, "ego," nobody could have an "ego" in their world at the time of Napoleon (or before). The "thing" came about with Freud's ways of talking. After this word and related ones were invented, then the thing could be a part of someone's world. For the same reason, gravity didn't exist in the world before Newton. He "invented" it. Importantly, Newton did not simply label a force that was already in the world; he formed our understanding of the force with his ways of talking. The reason this is important is that the language in which dialogue is understood and practiced literally makes it a possibility. In other words, you need to understand and speak in certain ways in order to make dialogue a possibility in your life.
The next subsection is about identity, and it's probably easier to understand but harder to apply. Bruce and Jeff begin by noting that the single greatest barrier to dialogue is the pervasive human impulse to defend one's identity... from any perceived threat. Dialogue breaks down most often, in other words, when people get defensive (remember Gibb's essay in Chapter 9). Dialogue definitely does not require that you eliminate every bit of defensiveness, or that you give up your values and beliefs and agree with every conversation partner. But it does require that you differentiate between "being right" and "being committed." Echoing some of the readings in Chapter 3 of *Bridges Not Walls*, Bruce and Jeff explain how, consciously and unconsciously, people engage with others in various ways to construct identities, and then we struggle to defend them as if they were "given" rather than actually constructed or "invented." Everybody operates this way so defensiveness is not a psychological weakness but a part of what it means to be human. This means that the goal is not to eliminate this part of what makes you human, but, as Bruce and Jeff put it, is to "give up taking [your] own defensiveness personally." You grant the existence of defensiveness as inevitable so you can move beyond it to "identify with the whole of the conversation, rather than my piece of it."

"Presence" is the third idea that needs to be understood in order to distinguish dialogue as a possibility. Bruce and Jeff explain that it's impossible, again, to prescribe a series of steps to guarantee that people are present to each other, so the teacher of dialogue instead has to "create the possibility of actually being present." They conclude this section, "In a moment of pure, naked presence, there are only you and I as possibilities, and the possibility of the human relationship, a blank canvas upon which to create. An inquiry into presence is an important aspect of preparation for dialogue."

Again, these are not simple ideas. And they are important. I encourage you to invest some time and effort in appropriating them. Read these pages slowly, read them more than once, discuss them with classmates, jot down questions you have, participate in the discussion in class. If you want, look again at what I've written in Chapters 1 and 2, and what Martin Buber writes in the final chapter of this book. I really believe your efforts will be rewarded.

**Can Dialogue be Taught?**

Bruce Hyde and Jeffery L. Bineham

Although communication departments in this country regularly offer courses in persuasion and argumentation, courses in dialogue are rare. This is not surprising, Dialogue, as a discourse form, is characterized by a commitment to openness and indeterminacy, making precise formulation or pedagogical explication problematic. Further, practitioners and theorists of dialogue often differ widely on their definitions of the term. Cissna and Anderson, in the first chapter of their 1994 volume *The Reach of Dialogue* (edited with Arnett), have traced the traditions of dialogue presented in the works of Buber, Bakhtin, Gadamer and others. Dialogue in these traditions is variously conceptualized as a type of relationship, a form of communication, a framework for knowledge creation, an interaction between interpreter and text, or a characteristic of language itself (Cissna & Anderson, 1994, pp. 10-13). Particularly in the work of Buber, whom Stewart has called "the one author who initially did the most to describe dialogue and attempt to place it at the center of the human studies" (1994, p. ix), dialogue is ultimately seen as a way of being with another person. In current popular usage, on the other hand—including, for example, President Clinton's recent call for a "national dialogue on race"—what is being referred to is clearly a way of talking with others.

In considering the possibility of teaching dialogue, we will borrow from O'Keefe the idea of subscript use, so that we may differentiate between two phenomena which we will refer to as dialogue, and *dialogue*. Dialogue, indicates a form of discourse. Specifically, dialogue, is non-polarized discourse. Its dynamic is not oppositional, but collaborative. Its proposed outcome is not the ascendance of one perspective over another, but the fusion of all perspectives to enable a larger, more inclusive view, one which allows the tension of disagreement. From within this common understanding, resolutions may be created that could not have been foreseen from any partial view, participants in dialogue, may make arguments—that is, they may make claims and support these claims with reasons—but in a dialogic context, these claims are included rather than rebutted, and are explored for areas of commonality rather than points of clash. Rigorously collaborative, dialogue, is the potential wellspring of what Bohm calls "social intelligence" (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1991). Such conversation generates new possibilities in communities and organizations by fostering collective thinking.

**Dialogue** is a relational space. This is the ontological aspect of dialogue, the dialogic way of being with another person. It is referred to variously by Buber (1987, 1988) as the *between*, the interhuman, and the *I-Thou*. Dialogue, is a manifestation of that state of ontological human relatedness that Martin Heidegger calls *Being-with* (1962, pp. 153-157). It is characterized by openness, trust, presence, and an understanding of the other that arises not from psychological compatibility but from shared humanity. As Cissna and Anderson (1998) have suggested, this way of being may manifest as "an extended state of high quality mutuality," or it may consist of "dialogic moments"—"important yet ephemeral moments of human meeting" (p. 63). Dialogue, however fleeting, is ultimately the heart of dialogue.

With regard to a pedagogy of dialogue, our experience is that a communication class can reliably and consistently provide students with an important experience of *dialogue*, —an experience that will reveal to them both the...
limitations that polarized discourse imposes upon our ability to deal effectively with problematic social issues, and the possibilities that dialogue affords for addressing such issues. In our view, dialogue is a much-needed practice in our culture, and the development of a pedagogy which can produce it is a highly appropriate and attainable goal for our discipline. Dialogue, can be taught, and we—speech communication educators—are the people to do it.

Dialogue, on the other hand, is elusive. According to Buber, it comes by grace (1987, p. 11). It is not subject to pedagogical formalization, and cannot be promised in a course syllabus. Therefore we emphasize that the insights of dialogue, may be attained fully, whether or not they are accompanied by an experience of dialogue. We cannot guarantee our students an I-Thou relationship with their classmates; but we can show them how to avoid the frustrations of polarized argument, and thus we can begin the important work of transforming our culture’s public discourse.

At the same time, we must note that the relationship between dialogue, and dialogue, is a subtle one. The practice of new forms of discourse will inevitably affect our natures as communicative beings. Thus the practice of dialogic communication often generates transformative experiences of dialogic relatedness and mutuality. Students in our classes frequently remark on the sense of authentic relatedness that characterizes their dialogue sessions. They begin by learning how to engage in a nonpolarized conversation, but may end by being more open and trusting with each other. Thus, although the goal in our classes is primarily a pragmatic pedagogy of dialogue as a discourse form, as educators we remain always open to moments of dialogue, and invite them whenever and however we can. Their possibility makes a dialogue classroom a potentially extraordinary educational environment.

ELEMENTS OF A TEACHING APPROACH TO DIALOGUE

The essential particulars of dialogue cannot be formalized. The pedagogical approach that we have taken, therefore, is to distinguish dialogue as a possibility in discourse. This approach draws on the work of Landmark Education, an organization whose educational methodology has been the subject of considerable research by Hyde (1990, 1992, 1994, 1995). Landmark's pedagogy is based in the dialogic development of distinctions. According to Steve Zaffron of Landmark:

Getting a distinction is like what happens as you learn to ski. When you first stand at the top of a slope and look down all you see is a lot of snow and a really steep drop-off. As you practice and become more expert, you begin to be able to see differences between one slope and another. Standing at the top of a slope you see moguls and other subtle variations in the terrain that make for easier or more difficult paths down the mountain. In addition, the mountain no longer seems steep. These characteristics of the mountain were always there, but before you just didn’t see them. That’s what getting a distinction does. (Wruck & Eastley, 1997, p. 8)

From this perspective, it can be said that the possibility of dialogue exists in many conversational encounters, but has not been distinguished for most of us. Our cultural predisposition is to listen for opportunities to agree or disagree, not to engage in dialogue.

In Zaffron’s example above, practice in skiing is a process of developing distinctions. Coursework in dialogue has the same purpose. The goal is not to learn concepts, but to distinguish the possibility of dialogue in interaction. For the trained skier, a trip down the mountain does not involve applying information that he or she has learned. Rather, the training has altered the world of the skier so that the mountain occurs as skiable. Coursework in dialogue is likewise designed to alter the participant’s world so that conversations occur naturally as openings for dialogue.

Distinctions differ from concepts. One understands concepts, but one dwells in distinctions; they transform one’s reality. For example, conditions for much of humanity have been transformed by the introduction into the world, at some point in history, of human rights. This transformation has occurred, not because we understand the concept of human rights, but because we dwell in the distinction. For most of us, our world is such that human beings simply occur for us as beings with rights, and we respond appropriately.

Distinctions also differ from definitions. Definitions provide limits; distinctions generate possibilities. For example, at one point during his term as U.S. president, Jimmy Carter convened a World Conference on the family. It drew an international body of participants, all of whom had demonstrated in their countries a commitment to family issues. But the conference failed to accomplish its first order of business, which was to agree on a definition of “family.” This failure is not entirely surprising; within our own culture, we struggle as new forms of family—single-parent, extended, gay/lesbian—contend for inclusion within our model. “Family” is not, at this point, easily defined. But participants at Carter’s conference, despite their cultural differences, had certainly distinguished family; their backgrounds demonstrated active commitment to the possibility indicated by that term. They did not, however, recognize the difference between distinction and definition. Therefore they remained stuck in a struggle at the level of definition. Rather than exploring the range of definitions that could be generated from the distinction “family,” they felt constrained to seek a specific definition of “family.” The focus made salient their differences rather than their mutual understanding.

Consider another example: art as a distinction. From early in life, we begin to receive hints about the nature of art. Generally our first conceptualization of art, learned in elementary school, is drawing and painting. Later we learn that sculpture, music, and literature may be art, and that there are also performing arts and even culinary arts. Over the years, we read and think about art, and stand or sit in the presence of many works of art. As a result of these experiences,
Language as Constitutive of the World

To those in the discipline of speech communication, the notion that language is not merely representational, but provides the world with its meaning, is not a new one (see, for example, Bineham, 1995; Brummett, 1976; Deetz, 1973; Scott, 1967; Stewart, 1995). But we suggest that while many of us understand this theory, far fewer of us live it. In large part, most human beings are commonsense Cartesians. We spend much of our lives struggling with the way things "are," rather than savoring the malleability that a constitutive view of language, fully distinguished, might lend our world. The aim of a classroom conversation on this topic, then, is that students begin to dwell in the possibility of such a view, and not merely understand the theory. To gain access to the generative nature of dialogue, one must be open to the power of language to create meanings.

In our experience, one of the most difficult points for students to grasp here is that "language" does not refer merely to words, but to the understanding of things that accompany the words. For those in our society, for example, the word "chair" calls forth an understanding of the nature and function of chairs. In other cultures, other words (e.g., chaise) evoke a similar understanding. But imagine a culture where there were no chairs—a culture where people stood, or sat on the ground, and whose language, and corresponding understanding of the world, did not include chairs. If someone from such a culture encountered an object of the kind that we how as a chair, that object would not occur for him or her as a chair. Thus chair-ness is not implicit in the object. Being-a-chair arises in language. Nor is language limited to words; to sit in the object is to language it as a chair. In the words of Einstein, "It seems that the human mind has first to construct forms independently before we can find them in things" (1954/1982, p. 266).

A useful example of the role of language in creating the world is found in Helen Keller's autobiographical accounts of her early childhood (1908, 1955). Stricken at nineteen months by an illness which left her unable to see or hear, Keller was virtually without language and the understanding it makes possible. Writing of that period, she refers to herself as "Phantom," a "little being governed only by animal impulses. . . . Her few words wilted [and] silence swooped upon her mind and lay over all the space she traversed" (1955, pp. 37, 41). Thus we may begin to distinguish art as a realm, a way of seeing, a clearing in which to encounter a painting or a performance; and sometimes, the possibility having been distinguished, these things may occur for us as art.

The process of developing a distinction, then, is not necessarily linear or logical. It is, rather, a matter of engaging in a number of related conversations and activities that, collectively, unconceal the new possibility. Based upon our experience, we believe that there are several topics whose discussion is useful, if not essential, in order to distinguish dialogue. In the next section of this essay, we briefly explore three of these topics: language, identity, and presence. This exploration is intended to suggest ways of developing a pedagogical conversation that will engage students actively in creating the possibility of dialogic communication.

Keller was not merely wordless, she was worldless. "Before my teacher came to me," she writes, "I did not know that I am. I lived in a world that was no-world" (1908, p. 113). But when she was awakened by her teacher to the meaning-function of language," the nothingness vanished" (1955, p. 42), and Keller was awakened simultaneously to both a self and a world: "When I learned the meaning of 'I' and 'me,' and found that I was something, I began to think. Then consciousness first existed for me" (1908, p. 117). Keller's story is a useful pedagogical tool because it demands that students consider the question: what would it be like to exist in a world of objects but no meanings? Struggling with this question—as they must, immersed as they are in an environment of meaning—they confront the role of language in creating their world.

To this end, it is likewise useful to contrast the linguistic world of human beings with the environment in which other animals exist. As Freire (1993) points out in his discussion of language and dialogue, human beings are the only beings who think about themselves and their actions. Other animals "are unable to separate themselves from their activity and thus are unable to reflect upon it" (p. 78). Thus we suggest to students that they eliminate the cartoon thought-balloons that they are accustomed to seeing above the head of Garfield and Snoopy, and imagining above the heads of their own pets. Nonhuman animals, says Freire, cannot set objectives, or commit themselves, or take risks, since all of these involve meaningful reflection. Nor do animals "have" emotions in the same way that human beings do; it is more accurate to say that animals are their feelings. Freire borrows Sartre's terminology to designate this difference: animals are "beings in themselves," whereas humans are "beings for themselves" (pp. 78-81). An example from Schudson (1997) is relevant: "Charles Darwin argued that every human expression of emotion except one has an analogue in other species. The distinctively human manifestation of emotion is blushing; Darwin explains that it is 'the thinking what others think of us that makes us blush'" (p. 302). Only humans, as beings for themselves, experience the reflexivity that gives rise to a blush.

These are challenging ideas for students to contemplate, especially because any understanding of the "inner lives" of nonhuman animals is, to some degree, speculative. But the empirical unresolvability of the matter is not an impediment to its pedagogical effectiveness. Ultimately, the point of this conversation is not to argue whether or not animals think, but to provoke students' active engagement with the question of language.

Thus, for pedagogical purposes, it is useful to state the matter provocatively. For example: Napoleon did not have an ego; the ego was invented by Freud, and wasn't available during Napoleon's lifetime. This idea violates students' common sense. Surely, they argue, the ego was always there. Freud simply discovered it and named it. But there is no ego. Ego, as well as the rest of the Freudian vocabulary, was created by Freud as a way of explaining his observations of human behavior. Subsequently, when human actions were observed through the lens of Freud's psychological distinctions, we were provided with a new understanding of our behavior, and consequently a new way of understanding,
and being, ourselves. We are not simply pre-Freudians with new labels. Since Freud, we have dwelt in a transformed self-understanding; and this is not because Freud "discovered" something "true" about human beings (many of Freud's ideas are, of course, being challenged by contemporary theorists), but because he created a new language. This creative process was not arbitrary; Freud did not simply "make things up." His vocabulary fit what we saw, and illuminated it. As a result, members of our culture have for years been matter-of-fact Freudians, assuming unthinkingly that the ego is as solid a piece of the human equipment as the head or the hands, and that it always has been.

A final idea to provoke student thinking about language: Newton invented gravity; prior to Newton, gravity did not exist in the world. Students, of course, protest this statement vehemently; but they can be led at that point to consider that Newton did not merely label or explain an already existing Phenomenon. Certainly there was, before Newton, a physical force; but Newton transformed the possibility of that force. Here is Heidegger's challenging statement regarding the nature of Newton's thought:

Before Newton's laws were discovered, they were not "true": it does not follow that they were false... Just as little does this "restriction" imply that the Being-true of "truths" has in any way been diminished. To say that before Newton his laws were neither true nor false, cannot signify that before him there were no such entities as have been uncovered and pointed out by these laws. Through Newton the laws became true and with them, entities became accessible in themselves to [human beings]. Once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which beforehand already were. Such uncovering is & kind of being which belongs to "truth." (1962, p. 269)

Thus, just as Freud observed human behavior, Newton observed the physical universe; and just as Freud invented a vocabulary that made phenomena accessible in a new way, transforming our understanding of ourselves, so Newton invented a new way of understanding the universe. In doing so, he expanded our world. This is the central point: a Newtonian universe is not simply the old universe with new labels. The possibilities for existence have been transformed by the new truths brought forth by the new language.

Human beings can inhabit only the world that has been distinguished in language by human thinking. The languaged world is, for human beings, the real world. Thus, one thousand years ago, the earth was flat. We recognize now the limits of that understanding—just as our late-twentieth-century understanding will undoubtedly seem limited to those living millennia hence. But as Stewart has pointed out, human beings do not live in "ontological outer space" (1995, p. 106). We inhabit the world given by human understanding in our time, and a thousand years ago, humans were given a flat surface. The earth became round when human thinking distinguished that possibility. And even that understanding of things may not be the "truth" of the matter, since physics continues to create new ways of seeing. Einstein's statement on this point is a clear and eloquent pedagogical tool:

Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavor to understand reality, we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears its ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious, he may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he will never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his pictures with the real mechanism, and he cannot even imagine the possibility or the meaning of such a comparison. (Einstein & Infeld, 1938, p. 33)

Identity

Perhaps the single greatest barrier to dialogue is the pervasive human impulse to defend one's identity — one's self and whatever one identifies with and as oneself—from any perceived threat. When dialogue breaks down, it is invariably due to someone's holding tightly to the rightness of some position with which they identify themselves. Must we then suggest that participants in dialogue give up their values and beliefs in the interest of collaboration, and surrender their right to take a stand? Emphatically not. Instead, we find it valuable to differentiate between being right and being committed. Being right about one's position on an issue makes other positions wrong; being committed to authentic inquiry, on the other hand, gives room to engage productively with other points of view. Being right is a function of personal identity and its survival. Dialogue is the possibility of a commitment to something larger than one's identity.

Recent inquiry into the source and nature of human identity has begun to "decenter" the human subject, the carrier of personal identity, from its traditional role as the arbiter of human action. We suggest that if the full possibility of dialogue is to be realized, students must be introduced into this decentering process, so that aspects of their identities—beliefs, values, assumptions—can be subjected to authentic questioning. Generating this decentering conversation is, perhaps, the ultimate challenge for a pedagogy of dialogue, in part because we live in a culture where, on all fronts, people are being encouraged to build stronger identities—personal, ethnic, cultural, and subcultural. Self-esteem, we are told, depends upon a robust identity. Yet, at the same time, the culture and the world grow increasingly fragmented and contentious at the boundaries of these stronger and ever more numerous identities.

But if dialogue is to be reached, the question must be raised: what is the origin and function of identity? What is a "self," anyway? For the most part, unthinkingly, students assume that the personal pronoun "I" indicates a substantial entity of some kind that inhabits their body. It is vital, then, for them to consider that their body arrived on the scene before the "I" did, and that the "I" is, for the most part, their own creation. A human infant has no "I"—it has little or no sense of self, and no self-reflexive awareness (Dinkmeyer, 1965, p. 188; Stern, 1985, p. 6). But as the infant's inborn capacity for language and
self-reflection begin to awaken, and she or he notices a perceiver at the center of the perceptions, the infant begins creating an identity for that perceiver, primarily in response to early interactions with significant others. Thus, as one's world begins to have meaning, one designs an identity that is harmonic with the meanings of that world, and appropriate for living and surviving in such a world.

A "self," then, may be seen fundamentally as a conversation. If you ask a student to tell you about him or herself, he or she will respond with a list of values, beliefs, goals, interests, and historical events. Generally, we might say that this is a conversation about the self. But it may be more accurate to say that this conversation constitutes the self—that a self is a nexus of meanings surrounding a site of agency and perception, meanings that each of us aggregates over the years in response to the situations and interactions we encounter as we live.

Further, the thrust of identity, once it exists, is to perpetuate itself. The situation is stated here in Heidegger's treatise on the thinking of Nietzsche:

That beings are—the "condition of preservation" for life—need not be thought in such a way that beings are something constant, existing in and for themselves "above" and beyond life. The only condition is that life instill of itself and in itself a belief in something it can constantly hold onto in all matters. . . . To be able to be as life, life needs the constant fixity of a "belief," but this "belief" calls for holding something to be constant and fixed, taking something as "in being." (Heidegger, 1961/1991, p. 62)

What one holds onto, as the vehicle for existence, is personal identity—including those elements of other identities (ethnic, national, etc.) that one has incorporated into one's self. If "I" cease to exist, existence as I know it ceases; and we are not making the obvious biological point here, but the ontological one. For a self-reflective being, continuing existence is accomplished by maintaining the validity of those meanings that constitute one's self.

Thus, our actions are driven largely by the survival needs of an invented identity, a drive cloaked in meaning and significance, in the cause of which we inflict massive suffering upon ourselves and others. This is not to say that we do not, in the process, experience love and joy. But the context for these experiences, and the cause they ultimately serve, is identity. To sacrifice for others—to trade material rewards for the satisfactions of "selflessness"—is a move to a subtler level of personal gratification. Although such sacrifice may greatly benefit others, self-interest is unavoidably imbedded in all our actions, even our best ones. Further, to deny that this is so is to validate it, because such denial is itself an act of self-interest.

Why is this point important? Why is it valuable for students of dialogue to contemplate their inescapable self-concern? Because it allows the realization that human defensiveness—the need to be right, the tendency to defend one's position rather than open it to inquiry—is not a psychological phenomenon, but an ontological one. Defensiveness is not the closed-minded impulse of an individual personality. It is a manifestation of the nature of being; it is being doing its thing, that is, continuing-to-be. Therefore, in the interest of distinguishing the possibility of dialogue, the goal of an inquiry into human identity is to create the possibility that participants may give up taking their own defensiveness personally. If one can recognize defensiveness as an inevitable aspect of human being, and can grant it being without feeling personally to blame for it, there is a possibility beyond it. This is the beginning of responsibility as a freedom, and a transformed relationship to identity. Heidegger proposed that an authentic self is one that has broken through its concealments and disguises, and has been "taken hold of" (1962, p. 167). If one can thus take hold of one's antithetical tendencies—neither indulge nor resist them, but own them, allow them, suspend them, observe them—one is no longer owned by them. One is then nearer to an authentic embrace of one's own humanity, and an authentic acceptance of the humanity of others.

Inquiry into the nature of identity is important in distinguishing dialogue because, ultimately, the central question for a participant in dialogue is this: can I identify with the whole of the conversation, rather than my piece of it? Can I stand in a commitment to a larger possibility than my own position? Am I willing to consider giving up a part of who I am, in the interest of what we might become? Such willingness is more likely if one recognizes the constructedness of one's identity.

One of the most important results that we have observed in our work with dialogue is a particular shift in students' relation to their position on an issue. This shift is away from "I hold this view because it is the right position," and toward "I hold this view because of my background and experiences; my position on this issue is the natural result of those experiences." More importantly, this shift is accompanied by a corresponding move from "The person who holds an opposing view of mine is wrong," toward "This person's opposing view is a natural result of their background and experiences, and I understand why they hold that view." We believe that this is the essential first step in achieving dialogue. It does not mean that, at this point, the student changes his or her opinion, but that she or he has reached the point of respectful understanding of the other's perspective. This is the point from which authentic dialogue can begin. This shift is achieved, we believe, by distinguishing the constructed nature of human identity.

Presence

Finally, an idea that is central to dialogue as we understand it is the notion of presence or presentness to the other. Here again, the conversation is challenging, because the terrain is tricky and rich with paradox. Any definition or conceptualization of presence cannot capture the phenomenon, because, if one is engaged with a concept of presence, one is not present. To be present is to be in the world at the moment, not "in one's head." So the challenge for a pedagogy of dialogue is to design an inquiry whose aim is not to define or explain presence, but to create the possibility of actually being present.
Buber's work, especially the opening sections of *I and Thou* (1958/1987), are particularly useful for generating this discussion. For the most part, according to Buber, we relate to the world through the filter of the past (an I-It relationship), who we know ourselves to be, and what we know about others, are products of the past. I how who you are because I know who you were; but this situation leads to objectification. In a state of pure presence, I would see you newly in each moment, unlimited by the strictures of my past experience. Such a state, however, is unimaginable, and would be untenable. In its pure form, a perpetual condition of presence would have us wondering each morning who the person in the mirror is, would rob us of the often valuable opportunity to learn from our experiences, and would leave us boggled in our attempts to navigate everyday existence. Therefore, as Buber makes eloquently clear, all presence must quickly devolve into past. Moments of presence, as soon as they are noticed, become memories or concepts of presence.

But it is valuable to think hard about what is meant here by a "moment." When we speak of a "moment of presence," we are not talking about an instantaneous point in clock-time. "The present is not fugitive and transient," says Buber, "but continually present and enduring" (1958/1987, p. 13). It is as if, when one is present, one is standing outside of clock-time. Presence expands time. In moments of presence, one senses that time may not be the rigid grid of seconds, minutes, and hours within whose confines we ordinarily exist. All of us have experienced such moments, when we were surprised during an event to discover, glancing at a clock, how much (or how little) time had passed. Our commonsense objectivist tendency in such moments is to credit clock time as valid, and to discount our own experience of lived time as a psychological aberration. But perhaps not. An inquiry into the possibility of time as a malleable phenomenon may be useful in distinguishing a dialogic way of being.

Presence is elusive, but it may be glimpsed, and moments of presence can be achieved. Although fleeting, such moments may prove transformative. The problems that prevent dialogue—all the personal, social, and cultural identity issues that divide us—are artifacts of the past. *Racism is not present.* In a moment of pure, naked presence, there are only you and I as possibilities, and the possibility of the human relationship, a blank canvas upon which to create. An inquiry into presence is an important aspect of preparation for dialogue. . . .

**EPILOGUE**

In a recent essay on conversation and democracy, Schudson writes that "democratic talk" is essentially civil, oriented to problem-solving, public, and, because it involves diverse people and ideas, uncomfortable (298-299). The view of dialogue to which we are committed is consistent with Schudson's perspective. We are not interested here in a dialogue that consists of homogeneous social discourse and thus does not feature the need to address tough public problems about which people hold conflicting views. Our most practical goal is to develop the practice of dialogue as a complement to argument, especially argument as conceived by Johnstone. Our culture needs (and wants!) a critical mass of people who will resist the simplicity of polarized debate and embrace the possibility of public dialogue. The communication discipline is positioned well to address this need, and we hope our colleagues will join us in an effort to improve the quality of public talk about important issues.

This work should also produce some important theoretical outcomes. One conviction that underlies our work, for example, is that we should seek to operationalize our theoretical ideas about language as a constitutive force in human affairs. These ideas about language have a history in the philosophy and theory of communication (a short view might trace this history to the "rhetoric as epistemic" literature, a long view would trace it at least to Plato and the Sophists), and we want to tap into that history in order to suggest some practical applications of those ideas. In this paper we have done this by developing a way to teach dialogue premised specifically upon the idea that language is constitutive, and upon ideas related to the construction of identity and presence. Our *focus* is to develop the theory and practice of dialogue; but to do that also requires development of these related concepts, and so we hope our essay advances theoretical discussions about the connections among communication, identity, and presence. . . .

The challenge before us is daunting and worthwhile. It is daunting because our most basic cultural assumptions encourage us to engage in bipolar argument and to defend our positions against any challenge. But it is worthwhile because we live in a time of pluralism and difference when many people recognize the need for a more productive type of discourse. If we, as communication educator-scholars, can teach dialogue effectively, we can illumine one route to that more productive public discussion.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Compare and contrast *dialogue* and *dialogue*.
2. The authors explain what "getting a distinction" means with the help of an example from skiing. In your own words, explain what it means to "understand the mountain as skiable."
3. What's the relationship between a definition and a distinction?
4. "Language," as these authors use the term, does not just mean words. What does it mean?
5. Paraphrase: "Newton invented gravity; prior to Newton, gravity did not exist in the world."
6. Are Bruce and Jeff arguing that people should stop being defensive? Explain.
7. What can it possibly mean to say that "self...[is] fundamentally a conversation"?
8. Explain what you think it means to be "present to the presentness of the other."
PROBES

1. Dialogue, according to these authors, "comes by grace." "Grace" sounds like something you'd hear about at church. Explain Bruce and Jeff's point about communication here.

2. Consider what you've learned about public speaking, conflict management, or group discussion as knowledge of some relevant "distinctions." Explain what it means to learn to understand how a public speaking situation "unconceals new possibilities." Or describe how you have learned to understand a conflict as "manageable." Or describe how you can now "distinguish" group discussion.

3. Humans are able to think about ourselves and our thinking in ways that, so far as we now know, other animals don't. Provide some evidence that supports this claim. What evidence might dispute this claim (consider what we know about dolphins, whales, or chimps)?

4. Paraphrase, paying special attention to the italicized words: "Human beings can inhabit only the world that has been distinguished in language by human thinking."

5. Explain what it means to "identify with the whole of the conversation rather than my piece of it."

6. Although dialogue, (genuinely collaborative conversation) is not all that common, most of us have experienced it at one time or another, during a conversation with a friend, or even in a committee meeting or at work. Recall a time you experienced it. Then describe what effect that experience had—or could have had—on your experience of Dialogue.

REFERENCES


