Dialogue: Bridging Personal, Community, and Social Transformation

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Abstract

The concept and practice of dialogue has underpinned key developments in humanistic psychotherapy and counseling. However, dialogue has also been adopted by, and incorporated into, a range of educational, community and social theories and practices, and in this sense forms a valuable bridge between humanistic psychology and the wider field of sociopolitical theory and activity. This article critically reviews how the concept of dialogue has been developed and applied in four key domains, each oriented around the work of a principal theorist: psychotherapy (Martin Buber), education (Mikhail Bakhtin), community development (Paulo Freire), and social transformation (Jürgen Habermas). Drawing this analysis together, the discussion identifies three principal ways in which the term *dialogue* has been used: *transformative, ontological*, and *everyday*; outlines the different levels at which dialogue can take place; and identifies key questions for further exploration.

Keywords

dialogue, humanistic psychotherapy, interpersonal communication, theories of education, social change

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Within the field of humanistic psychology, the concept of *dialogue* has played a key role in underpinning, and driving, developments in psychotherapeutic theory and practice (e.g., Cooper & McLeod, 2011; Friedman, 1975, 1985, 1996, 2002; Heard, 1993; Hycner, 1985; Jacobs, 1989; Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Yontef, 1998). Its usage, however, goes far beyond the psychotherapeutic field, extending into areas such as education, community development, and social transformation. This means that the concept of dialogue has the potential to form a valuable bridge between humanistic psychology and the wider field of social and political theory and praxis. Given recent calls for the humanistic psychology community to move beyond its tendency to focus on individual change processes (Cooper, O'Hara, Schmid, & Bohart, in press), this bridge into the wider sociopolitical arena may be of particular importance.

Historically, the concept and practice of dialogue can be traced back to Socrates and Plato (Nightingale, 2000). Socrates did not write philosophical treatises, instead he engaged his fellow Athenians in dialogue. Probing questions revealed contradictions, leading his interlocutors to revise their basic assumptions. The Socratic Method never tells interlocutors what to think, rather the dialogue leads them to reconstruct their own assumptions.

The aim of this article is to review how understandings, and usages, of this concept of dialogue have evolved in four key areas—psychotherapy, education, community development, and social transformation—and to develop a more coherent framework for conceptualizing, and taking forward, this concept and praxis. Not all writers on dialogue are discussed in this article (for instance, we have not attempted to review the work of Daniel Bohm, 1996), but we hope to have covered key theorists and the principal areas of dialogical studies.

Dialogue in Psychotherapy: The Buberian Tradition

The concept of dialogue, as used and developed in the psychotherapy field—primarily by humanistic and existential psychologists—is based almost exclusively on the work of the German-Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber: both in his best-known text, *I and Thou* (1923), and in his 1929 essay "Dialogue," which sought to clarify the dialogical principle (Buber, 1947) presented in *I and Thou*. In some instances, Buber (1947) uses the term *genuine dialogue* to refer to the particular form of interpersonal encounter that he focused on—characterized by a depth of meeting and mutual openness—but, usually, he simply refers to this form of relating as "dialogue," and this is the term most widely used in the psychotherapy field (e.g., Friedman, 1985; Mearns & Cooper, 2005).

Buber's concept of dialogue emerged from a fertile stream of 19th- and 20th-century religious existentialism (Bergman, 1991), beginning with Kierkegaard and progressing through Cohen, Ebner, and Rosenstock to Rosenzweig. However, while previous existential theologians tended to articulate—and advocate for—a stance of dialogical *receptivity* primarily in terms of human beings' relationship with God, Buber articulated it primarily in terms of human beings' relationships with other human beings. Similarly, while for theologians such as Rosenzweig (2005), *love* for one's fellow human beings radiates outward as a consequence of receiving God's love, for Buber, it is through authentic encounter and dialogue with one's fellow human beings that one can come to encounter a higher spiritual presence.

Buber's (1947, 1958) concept of the dialogical, *thou-ifying* relationship was drawn on by a number of existentially and phenomenologically oriented psychiatrists in the first part of the 20th century, most notably, Binswanger (Spiegelberg, 1972), Trüb (1964), von Weizsäcker (1964), Farber (1967), and Laing (1965, 1969). This went on to inform the work of existentially and phenomenologically orientated psychotherapists and counselors to the present day, most notably, Yalom (1980) and Spinelli (Cooper & Spinelli, 2012; Spinelli, 2007). From the 1970s onward, Buber's work was also directly transformed into a system of *dialogical psychotherapy* by one of his closest American associates, Friedman (1985, 2008; Heard, 1993). In 1957, Buber participated in a public dialogue with Carl Rogers (R. Anderson & Cissna, 1997), and it is thought that this debate strongly influenced Rogers's later work (1980), as well as the subsequent development of a specifically *dialogical* school of person-centered therapy (Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Schmid, 2001a, 2001b, 2006; Schmid & Mearns, 2006). Within the humanistic psychotherapy field, Buber's work has also been very influential on the development of gestalt therapy, with the emergence, again, of a specifically *dialogical* perspective (Clarkson, 1997; Hycner, 1985, 1990, 1991; Hycner & Jacobs, 1995; Jacobs, 1989; Yontef, 1998). Contemporary systemic and family therapies, most notably, *contextual therapy* (Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991), have also drawn extensively from Buber's concept of dialogue (e.g., H. Anderson, 2007; Bertrando, 2007).

Buber (1947, p. 37) defines dialogue as a form of communication "where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them." Mearns and Cooper (2005), drawing on Bugental's (1976) definition of *presence* as *accessibility* and *expressivity*, suggest that such dialogical *co-presence* can be

articulated in terms of two, mutually reciprocated movements: *receptivity* and *expressivity*.

Receptivity

For Buber (1947, p. 40), the first, and most basic, movement in a dialogical encounter is a "turning" toward the other: an attentiveness, receptivity, or responding to their Being. And, for Buber (1947), as with those who have adapted his work to the psychotherapeutic field (e.g., Cooper & Spinelli, 2012), what is essential is that this turning is toward the *particular* Being of the Other—their unique and individual existence—the one that is concretely and existentially in the situation, made "of flesh and blood" (Bergman, 1991, p. 2). This is contrasted with a more abstract or generalized experiencing of the other, when they are perceived as an instance of a universal category or law (for instance, "a schizophrenic" or "a borderline").

From an experiential dialogical standpoint, dialogue requires an *I–Thou* attitude (Buber, 1947, p. 50) toward the Other. This is described by Buber (1958) as one of the two fundamental stances that one can take in relation to another, the other being the *I–It* attitude. For Buber, the I–Thou attitude is not only characterized by this relating to the Other in their particularity but also a "standing alongside" the Other, and an experiencing of them as a fluid, freely choosing subjectivity. In contrast, in the I–It attitude, the Other is experienced as a static, determined "thing," something that can be broken down into parts, and surveyed, studied, or measured. For Buber (1958), an I–Thou attitude is also characterized by a *confirmation* of the Other, defined by Friedman (1985, p. 134) as "an act of love through which one acknowledges the other as one who exists in his own peculiar form and has the right to do so." Spinelli refers to such a stance as an "accepting embrace" (Cooper & Spinelli, 2012).

From a Buberian perspective, a key element of this dialogical, thou-ifying stance is also that the I is open to receiving something "outside of" itself: something radically *other* to its own assumptions and understandings (Cooper, 2009; Schmid, 2006). Buber (1947) writes, "Each of us is encased in an armour whose task is to ward off signs" (p. 27). By this, he means that human beings are typically closed to the Being of the world and of others, tending to experience them solely in terms of their preexisting schema (in Piagetian terms, this would refer to the dominance of assimilation over accommodation). This, for Buber (1947), is the essence of a monologic relationship: that the other exists purely as a foil or "mirror" (Woods, 1969) to the self. Here, suggests Buber, the I may communicate with others, and may even have the appearance of being in dialogue, but is

actually participating in a "reflexive," narcissistic solipsism that does not "grope out over the outlines of the self" (Buber, 1947, p. 39). In contrast, in the dialogic relationship, the present and particular Beingness of the Other is received and responded to—a stance akin to Heidegger's (1966) world-opening *Gelassenheit*: "letting-oneself-into-nearness of Being." For Cooper (Cooper & Spinelli, 2012), this openness to Otherness requires that, in dialogue, the I must bring to the encounter *genuinely unfinished opennesses*: questions, uncertainties, areas of *unknowing* (Spinelli, 1997), through which the otherness of the Other can have room to emerge.

Moreover, in dialogue, the I must take the risk of allowing itself to be affected on by the Other, to be changed or altered, and in ways that it cannot predict or control (Buber, 1958; Farber, 1967). Buber writes that such a meeting is a "perilous" and "unreliable" encounter, in which "the well-tried context" is "loosened" and one's "security shattered."

Expressivity

From a Buberian perspective, the second—and entirely interrelated—movement characterizing dialogue is a mutual expressivity: the willingness by both parties to share themselves, authentically, in a situation (Bugental, 1976). Here, there is a particular emphasis on the willingness to share *all* of oneself (Buber, 1958)—to encounter the other as a cognitive-affective-embodied whole (Cooper, 2001)—and particularly those aspects of being that might be more withheld in everyday life, such as one's vulnerabilities (Farber, 1967, 2000) and flaws (Lietaer, 2001). This authentic expressivity, itself, has been characterized in terms of two movements (e.g., Lietaer, 2001): an internal awareness of one's actual experiences, and a willingness to communicate these experiences to an Other.

The first, "internal" movement in this process has been termed *congruence* (Lietaer, 2001) or *self-awareness*: a willingness to be with, and accept, all the different facets of one's own Being. Spinelli (Cooper & Spinelli, 2012) writes, "when there is that sense of 'meeting the other'. . . the 'other' who is met is not only the external other but also 'the other that I am'. It is an embrace of all (my) being" (p. 155). Within the field of focusing-oriented psychotherapy (Gendlin, 1996), this intrapersonal contact would be described as a *carrying-forward*, or explication, of some *implicit understanding*—the I "connects with" and symbolizes some understanding or experience that is only just emerging into consciousness. In focusing terms, then, dialogue could be understood as a process of *co-explication* (Cooper & Ikemi, 2012).

This internal symbolization then leads to the second element of expressivity: *self-disclosure* or *transparency* (Lietaer, 2001), the actual communication of one's authentic experiences to an Other. Buber, however, makes the point that dialogue is directly counter to a "universal unreserve" (Buber, 1947, p. 39), writing that "He who can be unreserved with each passer-by has no substance to lose."

Internal Dialogue

In the psychotherapy field, the term *dialogue* has been used primarily to refer to an interpersonal form of communication. Cooper (2003b, 2004, 2005; Mearns & Cooper, 2005), however, has developed these ideas further. Drawing on pluralistic models of the "self" (i.e., that the person can be understood in terms of multiple "subpersonalities," "self-positions," or "configurations of self," Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004; Mearns & Thorne, 2000; Rowan & Cooper, 1999), he argues that this concept can be transposed to the *intrapersonal* plane, hypothesizing two forms of self-relating, *I–I* and *I–Me*, which parallel Buber's (1958) distinction between *I–Thou* and *I–It* forms of interpersonal relating, respectively. In an I–I form of self-relating (i.e., *self-dialogue*), "a person communicates to themselves–or from one configuration to another–in an empathic and affirming way, recognising different feelings, behaviours, thoughts or configurations as valid and human ways of being" (Mearns & Cooper, 2005, p. 31). In contrast, in the I–Me form of self-relating (i.e., *self-monologue*),

> the person makes little attempt to try and 'get inside the shoes' of themselves when they behaved in a particular way, and to understand how they came to act in that manner. Rather, the self, or a part of it, is criticised and objectified, or the person may attempt to fully disown that particular way of being. (Mearns & Cooper, 2005, p. 32)

Cooper (2003b) argues that the process of helping clients move from an I–Me form to an I–I form of self-relating is an underlying aim of all humanistic psychotherapies and practices: from psychosynthesis, which invites clients to participate in guided daydreams to "get to know" their subpersonalities (Vargiu, 1974); to emotion-focused therapy, which uses two chair-work to facilitate dialogue between the different aspects of self (Greenberg, Rice, & Elliott, 1993). Here, the aim is not to challenge or change clients' essential, organismic ways of being, but rather to help them acknowledge, respect, and dialogue across all aspects of their lived-being.

Dialogue in Education: The Bakhtinian Tradition

Educational researchers have been interested in understanding dialogue primarily because talk or discourse is the key medium of instruction in the classroom. In the late 1980s, Bakhtin's and Freire's conceptions of dialogue attracted the attention of educational researchers. The field's changing emphasis on process over products—from transmission to the construction of knowledge and the development of *higher order thinking* (Cazden, 2001)—coupled with increasing attention to the study of classroom discourse, appeared to coincide with the enthusiastic reception of Bakhtin's and Vygotsky's works in the English-speaking world. Wertsch (2004, p. 51) stated that Bakhtin's concept of dialogue had "provided a sort of theoretical template for interpreting what goes on in classrooms and how existing practices might be productively transformed."

Bakhtin's (1984) ideas on dialogism are rooted in his rejection of a monologic worldview. He argued that "truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction." He further elaborated this view through the differentiation between *authoritative discourse* and *internally persuasive discourse*. Authoritative discourse is characterized as "prior discourse . . . indissolubly fused with its authority . . . is only transmitted" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 344). In other words, the speech is single-voiced and final. Bakhtin referred to the traditional teacher–pupil mode of interaction, where "someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 81), as *pedagogical dialogue*: a typical example of monologism. In contrast, internally persuasive discourse is an internal process and is closely linked with a person's ideological development (*ideological becoming*). It is described as "affirmed through assimilation . . . enters into an intense interaction, a struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values . . . not finite, it is open" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346).

Researchers dissatisfied with the transmission style of classroom instruction are particularly drawn to these Bakhtinian concepts. Some researchers tend to dichotomize these two modes of discourse, favoring *dialogic pedagogy* over *pedagogical dialogue* (Skidmore, 2000). However, Bakhtin (1981, p. 342) considered that "the struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness."

Furthermore, Bakhtin is concerned about dialogue of diverse views embodied in people's voices, which exists in the "inter-individual and inter-subjective"

realm and as "dialogic communion between consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 88), embedded in "a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276). How this is dialogically manifested is best captured in his rich exposition of the relation between the speaker and the listener in the concrete act of active understanding, where two conceptual horizons are mutually enriched.

Bakhtin (1981) places primacy on the part of the listener, who "creates the ground for understanding" (p. 282). Through assimilating the speaker's word into one's existing conceptual system, the listener enters into an internal dialogical struggle, "striving to understand, establish(ing) a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements . . . (And) it is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on" (p. 282). It is then the speaker's turn to struggle internally with the newly introduced elements by the listener into his original discourse. To reach *dialogic communion*, the speaker needs to understand his own conceptual system in relation to that of the listener's. He enters into dialogical relationships by "break(ing) through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, construct[ing] his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's apperceptive background" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282). Thus, intersubjectivity in the Bakhtinian sense constitutes of the speaker's orientation toward his own horizon in relation to the listener as well as the listener's orientation toward his own horizon in relation to the speaker.

Community Development: The Freirean Tradition

The work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) is the primary reference point for the conceptualization of dialogue in community development and community psychology (e.g., de Freitas, 2001; Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthorn, & Siddiquee, 2011; Montero, 2002; Seedat, Duncan, & Lazarus, 2001). For Freire, and for community workers after Freire, the concept of dialogue describes the appropriate form of human relationship between poor communities and external change agents or educators. It is introduced as a critique of the traditional hierarchical relationship in which "educated experts" bring new technical knowledge to "ignorant" communities (Freire, 1970, 1973). Instead, Freire argues, development will never succeed, and "experts" and communities will fail to achieve their full humanity unless an open, respectful dialogue is achieved between their different points of view.

Freire starts from the assumption that the world which we occupy is a humanly created world, and thus one that is open to debate and to change.

Our decisions about how to pursue agriculture, build infrastructure, conduct education, or distribute resources are all open to contestation and debate. There are always alternative ways of doing things.

However, if the knowledge of technician or educator is given precedence over the knowledge of communities, one version becomes treated as authoritative and correct, and this version ossifies the world into a single, apparently immutable reality. To allow for our understandings of the world to evolve and change in ways that liberate us, these understandings must be open to challenge through engagement with the perspectives of others.

In the Freirean tradition, dialogue is characterized by mutual respect and openness to being changed through the communication (Vaughan, 2011). Love, commitment, empathy, and trust are said to be the basis of dialogical relationships (Freire, 1973; Vaughan, 2011). Crucially, participants in a dialogue relate to each other as subjects, not objects: "for the truly humanist educator and the authentic revolutionary, the object of action is the reality to be transformed by them together with other people—not other men and women themselves" (Freire, 1973, p. 75).

To make such communication possible, an uncomfortable pair of *difference* and *recognition* (legitimacy) is necessary. Jovchelovitch (2007, p. 50) writes, "the basis for dialogue between knowledge systems involves de-centration of perspective and mutual recognition, where interlocutors are capable and prepared to mutually recognise each other's mode of knowing as different, but legitimate."

Difference of perspective is the source of creativity: Without difference there is nothing to discuss and nobody has anything to add (Gillespie, 2008; Jovchelovitch, 2007). The problem is that different forms of knowledge and different identities are so often placed on a hierarchy, so that one person's perspective is deemed (often by both other and self) less valid or legitimate than the other's. *Recognition* means that each party recognizes the other's knowledge (and their own) as legitimate and worth listening to.

In situations of historical hierarchies between groups, this recognition is not easy. One of Freire's primary concerns was to undo *internalized oppression*, that is, poor people's acceptance of the view that they and their knowledge are weaker or less valuable than the knowledge of privileged groups. So, for instance, prostitutes may construct themselves as worthless, fallen women, to whom nobody would want to listen (Cornish, 2006) or recipients of development aid may construct themselves as having *low knowledge* in relation to the experts who have *high knowledge* (Aveling, 2011). Simultaneously, people occupying dominant positions may be predisposed to assume that their knowledge is better than the knowledge held by the poor, and that there is nothing to be learned by listening.

Freirean theorizing about dialogue has been enthusiastically taken up in the context of participatory interventions for social change (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012). First, dialogue is considered as a means of enabling people to reflect critically on cultural discourses which may affect them in potentially undesirable ways. For instance, Watts and colleagues (Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt, 2002) worked with young African American men to discuss messages prevalent in popular culture regarding gender, culture, race, and social class, aiming to think critically about them rather than accept or adopt them. The idea is that by bringing such ideologies or norms into dialogue, people can take a distance from them, reflect on them, and generate new shared norms (Campbell & Scott, 2011).

Second, dialogue between "local" knowledge and "expert" knowledge is valued as a way of creating community interventions that are appropriate to the local context, rather than representing irrelevant foreign imports. As Freire (1970) writes,

> Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed. (p. 94)

Vaughan (2011) gives a contemporary example, in the context of HIV counseling in Papua New Guinea, where health educators and local *at-risk* young people have different perspectives on the risks and benefits of taking an HIV test. The health educator, she suggests, might seek to persuade a young person to take a test, based on his or her knowledge that access to treatment depends on first getting a diagnosis. However, the young person knows the cost of a positive diagnosis—in terms of the potential stigma that follows and the limited availability of treatment in their poorly serviced community. Dialogical engagement between these two sets of knowledge has the potential of producing a workable solution that benefits from both medical knowledge of disease and treatment, and local knowledge of contextual constraints.

In these contemporary usages, it is notable that the people who are typically engaged in a dialogue are community members and, at most, the frontline workers who work with the community. It is rare to find an intervention or study that succeeds in engaging relatively powerful actors such as higher tier managers, policy makers, program funders, or politicians in a dialogue with "service users" or "beneficiaries" (Campbell & Cornish, 2012; Campbell, Cornish, Gibbs, & Scott, 2010; Kelly & van Vlaenderen, 1996). Critiques of Freire's work center on its idealism, in particular, how difficult it is to

implement a genuinely mutual and respectful dialogue, given our hierarchical social relations and often opposing interests. Freire's writings emphasize the importance of elite and marginalized groups engaging in dialogue and jointly forging a new common future. However, it seems easier to engage the marginalized than the elite in a dialogical process. Power may protect people from needing to listen and may be difficult to give up.

Social Transformation: The Habermasian Tradition

Habermas's (1984) concept of dialogue, or rather *communicative action*, takes from Mead (1934), the idea that communication is the social coordination of joint action (Gillespie, 2005). Out of communication, or dialogue, a shared understanding of what to do next emerges. If the dialogue is not fair and equitable, then it is likely that the action outcomes are going to privilege some interests over others. Habermas takes this basic idea and raises it from interpersonal interaction to a conceptualization of how the public sphere should guide society.

According to Habermas (1984), communication produces nondistorted knowledge when (a) everyone who is involved in a given activity is part of the discussion to coordinate that activity, (b) status is disregarded, (c) personal interests do not intervene, and (d) participants in the discussion decide as peers using norms of rationality.

Political deliberation, Habermas (2006) states, has *truth-tracking potential*. The meeting of different perspectives in ideal speech situations leads to *de-centration*, such that each party becomes aware of and even animated by the interests of the other (Jovchelovitch, 2011). Thus nonegocentric, or perspective-transcending, knowledge emerges enabling political action to proceed as a manifestation of the will of the people. To achieve this ideal the public sphere should be independent from politics and commerce and there must be feedback from civil society. According to Habermas (2006, p. 420) "pathologies of political communication" include (a) too much state involvement in the media and (b) lack of participation from citizens due to the colonization of the mass media by exclusionary market forces.

Köchler (2009), building on this work, has taken the concept of dialogue to the broadest possible level, namely, dialogue between civilizations. The problem as he sees it is that there are multiple civilizations, at different points of identity development, with different priorities for development, and facing a shared set of problems in an increasingly shared and globalized world. There is, he argues, no turning back from mutual awareness and increasing integration. What is needed is a genuine intercivilizational dialogue which can foster a

shared future. This dialogue should be based on four principles: (a) Each civilization must recognize that all lifeworlds are equal, and that the concept of development cannot be applied, such that no one civilization can be seen to be more developed. (b) Awareness that self-comprehension comes through interaction with the other, that is to say, it is in and through the other that we become self-aware. (c) There needs to be an acknowledgement of *meta-norms*, such as tolerance and mutuality. (d) Finally, Köchler argues that civilizations need to transcend civilizational self-affirmation. In a sense, this means to try to transcend nationalism. At an individual level, this would equate with transcending egocentrism and personal identity claims which lead to resistance to change.

Köchler's analysis of our present predicament is somewhat negative. Since the end of the Cold War, he argues that there has been one dominant power block which has been asserting itself and practicing a double standard: There is rhetoric about dialogue, but there has been a war against difference. Such double standards, Köchler observers, undermine the possibility of genuine intercivilizational dialogue.

Discussion

Uses of the Term Dialogue

Across the range of theorists and fields in which the concept of dialogue has been used—and, indeed, sometimes within the same theorist (e.g., Bakhtin, 1984)—three main usages of the term can be identified. We refer to these as *transformative, ontological*, and *everyday*.

Transformative dialogue refers to a particular form of communication in which there is the possibility for profound learning, change, and growth (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001), and is the principal way in which the term *dialogue* has been used in the psychotherapy, educational, and community and social development fields. Such dialogue can be considered "abnormal" (Barge & Little, 2002, p. 376) in the sense that much everyday talk might be considered shallow, nongenuine, or monologic (see, Buber, 1947, pp. 37-39, for a colorful description of the different forms that monologue can take), and distorted by various interests and defenses. Dialogue, understood in this transformative sense, is equivalent to Buber's (1947) concept of genuine dialogue and Bakhtin's (1981) internally persuasive discourse, and is how theorists such as Freire (1970, 1973) and Köchler (2009) have used the term. This understanding of dialogue has also been defined as "prescriptive" (Kim & Kim, 2008; Stewart & Zediker, 2000), in the sense that it articulates how some theorists believe conversation "should" be.

Although this concept of transformative dialogue has emerged from a range of sources, the review highlights striking commonalities in how it is described. First, it is characterized by a deep respect and valuing of the other: The other is viewed as a subject, rather than as an object, of inquiry. Second, the dialogical relationship is characterized by mutuality: that the other is engaged with as an equal and in a nonauthoritarian way. Third, there is an *openness* to the other: a willingness to listen and to be changed. Closely linked to this, many traditions have also emphasized the process of *de-centering* that is essential to dialogue: a willingness to stand back from one's position and to see the world through the eyes of another. Finally, across each of the traditions, dialogue is seen as being key to a process of growth, development, and positive change—whether at the level of the individual, community, or society.

A second use of the term *dialogue*—along with its derivatives such as *dialogic, dialogical*, and *dialogism*—is in an ontological, rather than ontic, sense. Here it refers to a ubiquitous given of human existence (Heidegger, 1962), something that is intrinsic to both psychological and sociological processes (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986; Linell, 2009; Marková, 1982, 2003). Dialogue, in this sense, does not refer to a particular form of communication, but rather to the nature of human being per se—whether at the intrapersonal or interpersonal level—as outlined, for instance, in the intersubjective dialogism of Bakhtin (1984). Such dialogism holds that human beings are inherently intertwined in social relations with others, and it exists in opposition to *monologism*; but monologism is not a type of nongenuine dialogue. Rather, monologism refers to theories which are individualistic or mechanistic, and do not recognize an inherent interactionalism of human beings. In contrast to a transformative understanding, this use of the term *dialogue* can be considered *descriptive* rather than "prescriptive" (Kim & Kim, 2008; Stewart & Zediker, 2000), articulating what dialogue is rather than how it should be.

Finally, in the writings reviewed above, we can also identify a more mundane use of the term *dialogue*, which refers simply to *everyday* conversation and social exchange. This is, again, a descriptive use of the term, in that it focuses on what actually occurs in conversation without making any normative claims about what "should" take place. In addition to the domains above, the term *dialogue* has been used in this way across a range of social science studies focusing, for instance, on the micromechanics of how conversation operates, how people establish mutually shared reference (Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986), how people do things with words (e.g., how they demonstrate understanding and repair misunderstandings, Schegloff, 1992), how they exert power and influence (Blakar, 1979), and how people engage in subtle forms of discrimination and racism (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Levels of Dialogue

With respect to transformative dialogue (though this taxonomy could equally apply to its other forms), several levels of interaction have been posited in the literature. At the most micro level, as hypothesized by Bakhtin (1981), Cooper (2003b, 2004, 2005), and Gillespie and Cornish (2010), there is dialogue *within* the human being: between different voices or aspects of the self. Then, as with Buber (1947) and in the psychotherapy literature, there is dialogue at the *dyadic* level. Freire's (1970, 1973) work, as with the work of David Bohm (1996, see below), focuses on dialogue within *groups or communities*. Habermas's (1984) work extends this to dialogue across a *society* as a whole, with Köchler (2009), at the most macro level, focusing on dialogue across *civilizations*.

Areas for Investigation

As dialogue, in the transformative sense, is the principal interest for personal and social change theorists and practitioners, this article concludes by looking at how our understanding of this form of dialogue might be taken forward. Based on our review, we would suggest eight main questions for further exploration.

First, *What is the experience of dialogue?* We are still some distance from being able to clearly articulate what it means, or feels like, to engage in dialogue; what the essential invariants are of this experiencing (and, indeed, if such invariants actually exist). One aspect of this question is the issue of whether dialogue exists on a qualitative continuum with other forms of communication—that we can have greater or lesser degrees of dialogue—or whether it is a discrete experience that stands apart from others forms of interpersonal or intrapersonal communication. Such a question would probably be best explored through some form of phenomenological research (e.g., Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994), and could be examined at the range of different levels at which dialogue has been hypothesized to take place.

A second question, following on from the above, is *Is dialogue a truly intersubjective phenomenon?* That is, if one person is experiencing a sense of dialogical connection to another, is the other necessarily also experiencing it, or is it possible that a feeling of dialogue could exist for that individual only, without any reciprocity from an Other? Such a question is rarely addressed in the literature, but goes to the very heart of the meaning and nature of dialogue: If "dialogue" is, primarily, an individual, subjectively experienced phenomenon, is it really a meaningful concept? Here, quantitative methods

may be particularly useful in developing some understanding of the degree of mutuality involved in dialogue: for instance, asking therapists and clients to rate their feelings of dialogical connection with the other, such that the degree of matching could be evaluated. A preliminary study of this type found, indeed, that the degree of consensus between these two perspectives was relatively high (Cooper, 2012), but much more evidence is needed before this intersubjectivity can be taken as a given.

Third, *What does dialogue do?* Transformative dialogue, by its very nature, has been posited to bring about a wide range of therapeutic, educational, and sociopolitical improvements, but is this actually the case? And, if so, what are the benefits, and what are the processes by which they come about? Here, a key question to ask is whether it is dialogue, per se, as some constelled set of attitudes and activities, that is bringing about these changes, or whether it is simply the ingredients of dialogue (for instance, an openness to learning) that is then bringing about particular changes (e.g., greater knowledge). If it is the latter, then it might be argued that the concept of dialogue is, in effect, redundant: that the personal and social change processes can be more effectively and efficiently described in terms of a multiplicity of separate "cause-and-effect" relationships.

A fourth question, closely related to the above, is *What is, or should be, the relationship between dialogue and monologue?* Is it, for instance, that interpersonal communication tends to cycle between dialogic and monologic forms, or is it possible to remain consistently in dialogue with another human being or with the world? And, at a more "prescriptive" level, what is the optimal relationship between these two modes of being: whether at the therapeutic or social transformative level? For instance, should a therapist strive to maintain a consistently dialogical, I–Thou attitude toward his or her clients, or are their times when it may be helpful to adopt a more "it-ifying" stance: for instance, through psychometric testing or diagnosis? Here, qualitative interviews—for instance, with psychotherapists and clients—might be a useful way of exploring the nature of this relationship.

Fifth, assuming that dialogue is, in some way, or to some extent, of personal or social benefit, there is the question of *What facilitates dialogue?* Here, we might talk about *dialogenic* factors, distinguishing psychological and social variables. Psychological ones might include listening, genuinely unfinished opennesses, or a willingness to take risks (Cooper & Spinelli, 2012). Social factors might include relatively symmetrical power relations and shared interests. There are also the aspects of interpersonal "dialogue," understood in the everyday sense, that might facilitate transformative dialogue: for instance, establishing a mutually shared reference. Asking such a

question may be of critical importance in developing stances and interventions—across all the levels of change—that can serve to effectively facilitate dialogue. Again, however, there is a need to carefully disentangle "cause-and-effect" relationships: Is it, for instance, that dialogue leads to an openness to others, which then leads to greater learning and community development, or is it that a greater openness to others leads directly to greater learning and community development, with the experiencing of dialogue simply a phenomenological "by-product" of this process?

A sixth question, the reverse of the fifth, is *What inhibits dialogue?* That is, what are the factors or processes that create obstacles to transformative interchanges: for instance, hierarchical social structures, asymmetries of power, opposing interests, feelings of insecurity, a closedness to one's own experiencing, or various semantic barriers in how the other is conceptualized (Gillespie, 2008; Sammut & Sartawi, 2012)?

As with the question of dialogenic factors, in-depth qualitative interviewing may be very useful here to help develop an understanding of processes that inhibit dialogue. In addition, systematic reviews of the literature on dialogue could go a long way to identifying the factors that have already been identified to inhibit, and facilitate, dialogical communication. With each of the six preceding questions, it would also be very useful to develop some measure or inventory of dialogical engagement, which might be both self- and observer-rated. This could then be used in experimental studies to look at processes that inhibited or facilitated dialogue, as well as to help explore the effects of dialogue, the degree of matching across subjectivities, and the optimal dialogue/monologue balance.

A seventh question is *What is the relationship between the different levels of dialogue?* One aspect of this question is whether dialogue is essentially the same phenomenon from the intrapersonal to the intercivilizational level, and also whether at all these levels it has the same facilitating and inhibiting factors. For instance, is an openness to otherness an essential prerequisite for developing dialogue between self-positions, as well as between different nations? If so, this makes it a particularly powerful tool for bringing together theory and practice at—and across—these different levels. Another part of this question, however, is how dialogue at one level might facilitate (or, perhaps even, inhibit) dialogue at another level. For instance, if a psychotherapy client develops his or her capacity for I–I self-relating through two-chair work, does this mean that he or she will then be more able to engage more dialogically with their partner? There is also the question here of which way round this relationship goes, or works best? For instance, is it that the development of micro-level dialogical capacities facilitates macro-level dialogue,

is it the reverse, or is it that development at any one level can then facilitate development at other levels?

A final area of inquiry revolves around the question, "What is the relationship between dialogue, as understood in the transformative sense, and dialogue as understood ontologically?" That is, if we are beings who are fundamentally interrelational, whose very essence is an openness to others (Heidegger, 1962, 1966), how is it that we can come to relate to actual others in nondialogical, monologic ways? Such a question goes to the very heart of existential therapies such as Daseinsanalysis (Boss, 1963; Cooper, 2003a; Craig, 1988), which understand psychological distress in terms of a closedness to the world and yet, concomitantly, hold a fundamental belief in the world-openness of Being.

Conclusion

Dialogue, as an activity of personal and social transformation, has been adopted, developed, and implemented across a range of disciplines and fields. It is intrinsic to the work of many humanistic psychotherapists, but its reach goes far beyond that to teacher–student communication in primary school classrooms, to empowering community development practice, and to power relations between civilizations. Hence, by developing an understanding of dialogue, humanistic psychologists may be able to contribute to the development, not only of their own practice but also to a wide range of sociopolitical and community activities, as well as learning much from these fields for their own work. Dialogue, by having the capacity to transcend disciplines and levels of analysis, has the potential to be an enormously useful concept in understanding—and facilitating—the transformative potential of human interaction.

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