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ABSTRACT

Based on a course that inquired into the similarities and differences between the discourse forms of argument and dialogue, this paper explores theoretical issues related to these communicative forms. The purpose of the team-taught course was for students to explore the possibility of non-polarizing public discourse. The first two sections of the paper summarize the theoretical material on argument and dialogue that comprised the class discussions. The third section describes the specific course format and the activities by which students were able to put this theoretical material into practice. Contains 33 notes. (RS)

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Argument and Dialogue: A Pedagogical Exploration  
Into the Possibility of Public Discourse

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## Abstract

This paper is based on a course that the authors recently taught together. The course was an inquiry into the similarities and differences between two discourse forms, argument and dialogue. The purpose of the course was for students to explore the possibility of non-polarizing public discourse. This paper is divided into three sections. The first two sections summarize the theoretical material on argument and dialogue that comprised the class discussions. The third section describes the specific course format, and the activities by which students were able to put this theoretical material into practice.

**Argument and Dialogue: A Pedagogical Exploration  
Into the Possibility of Public Discourse**

What is dialogue? What is argument? What are the characteristics that define these forms of communication, and what implications do these characteristics have for the way we talk about difficult issues? Most important, how can we teach students to engage in such talk so that it is fruitful? These questions generated the project that we will discuss in this essay: a classroom exploration into the nature of productive public discourse.

Presently, argument is the paradigmatic form for public discourse in our society. Our governmental and academic institutions are structured upon the assumption that every issue has two sides, and that debate between advocates of those sides is the way to arrive at an optimal decision. Thus a predisposition to up-down argument is our inheritance as members of this culture. While the authors respect the power and validity of argument, we believe that the structure of debate imposes limitations on the way our culture deals with its problematic issues. We propose that a study of dialogue, a discourse form with different assumptions about human interaction, provides a useful complement to the study of argumentation.

In this culture, we listen to take sides. Consider the perennial issue of abortion: any public statement on that matter

is heard as an expression of one of two positions, which we have labeled pro-life and pro-choice. Discussions of the issue therefore occur as a contest between polarized positions, and emerging as the dominant position becomes the overriding consideration. What suffers is the possibility of moving beyond those two positions to the generation of a solution to the problem.

As educators, we inhabit an academic subculture where this socialized predisposition to argument is reinforced. Scholars argue for positions, and we defend our theses and dissertations against argumentative attack. This is not wrong; our arguments are often vigorous and productive, and their demand for clear reasoning sharpens our intellects. But the academic predisposition to argument imposes a certain direction upon discussion. This was driven home for one of the authors years ago in a graduate seminar. A student in the seminar had just expressed a particular viewpoint on a topic under discussion, and the author (also at that time a student) was about to articulate a response: "That's interesting, but I have a different point of view about that, so let's see what happens when we put them together." The instructor of the seminar, however, spoke first: "But I would argue that. . . ." The effect of this response was to place the two points of view in an oppositional structure, rather than allowing the tension of their differences to function as a productive partnership.

One of the authors recalls a recently televised discussion of violence in the media and its impact upon young viewers. Two of the participants were social scientists, and they were questioned about the research in this area; but while both scientists were familiar with the extant studies, they disagreed over the interpretation of the results. Within minutes, the discussion had become an argument over which of the scientists was right about his interpretation. It generated much heat but little light. This is a characteristic of our governmental discourse as well. The ideas and initiatives of each party are automatically opposed by the other, and much of the government's energy is spent resolving the implications of this oppositional starting point. Certainly disagreement will always arise; but the polarizing structure of our institutional discourse functions to reify the disagreements.

In this paper, we will discuss the relationship between argument and dialogue, exploring important theoretical issues related to these communicative forms. The first section of the paper summarizes some current assumptions about argument. In the second section, we explore components of a pedagogical inquiry into dialogue. The final section of the paper describes a class that we have designed to show students the value and utility of these two discourse forms.

### Argument

For purposes of this essay, the terms discourse and conversation refer to the genus of which argument and dialogue are species. We assume argument and dialogue to be two paradigmatic forms of discourse, each of which presumes certain types of communicative practices. Argument has gained supremacy, especially in Western cultures where discourse at many levels (interpersonal, academic/scholarly, business/professional, legal, political) is presumed more reasonable if structured as a debate in which propositions are stated and defended with more or less "logical" reasons. Neil Postman, though he bemoans the demise of this paradigm, provides a concise account of its historical supremacy in Western culture. He states that the print medium has featured a reliance on arguments and counterarguments, on "propositional content," on "a coherent, orderly arrangement of facts and ideas," and on "a sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; an abhorrence of contradiction; [and] a large capacity for detachment and objectivity."<sup>1</sup> Such are the characteristics of argument.

But communication scholars (such as Deetz and Stewart) and thinkers from other disciplines (such as Gadamer and Buber) suggest that dialogue is more conducive to the free expression of ideas, the creation of new ideas, and the affirmation of human beings. In this section, we will summarize some assumptions about argument that are basic to our discipline. The first group

of assumptions distinguish argument from dialogue; the second group link the two forms.

Wayne Brockriede defines argument as "a process whereby people reason their way from one set of problematic ideas to the choice of another."<sup>2</sup> Three elements of this definition are noteworthy for our purposes. First, argument is a process, which we take to be a communicative practice or a kind of engagement with another human being. We know that argument can also be conceived as a product or as a variety of different kinds of practices (argument 1, argument 2, argument 3, etc.), but our main concern here is with how argument is conducted on a daily basis among normal human agents (like our students) about controversial issues. Such arguments, we believe, both reflect and lead to the kinds of arguments we witness among politicians, business leaders, and the like.

Second, arguments involve the provision of reasons as support for claims. In one sense, any expression of belief or knowledge is an argumentative claim that requires evidence or reasons for support.<sup>3</sup> So even dialogue involves argument. But argument traditionally conceived features a particular type of reason-giving that is propositional and formal. These characteristics are most easily illustrated, of course, in the propensity to describe arguments as inductive or deductive forms, both of which require that specific propositions be organized according to a given structure (the most obvious example being the syllogism). Though communication scholars are generally less

interested in formal logic than philosophers, most argument texts do encourage an awareness of formal argument so that debaters can attack faulty logic when they encounter it. While we recognize the value of logical argument in discussion of virtually any issue, we also believe that many important kinds of reasons are not conducive to the structures of formal logic and, indeed, might be categorized as fallacious according to the rules of reasoning (anecdotal evidence is one such kind of reason).

The third important element of Brockreide's definition is that argument involves at least two sets of problematic ideas. This typically means that the possible resolutions to an argument are preexisting choices, one of which ideally will be embraced by the interlocutors. Though the possibility exists that arguers might construct a previously unconceived perspective, the paradigm of argument does not encourage that. The paradigm does encourage that the number of preexisting choices be reduced as far as possible, preferably to two, and that the proponents for those two sides engage in debate until one idea is proven better than the other. One need only look to the established formats for intercollegiate and political debate to see this paradigm at work.

The characteristics of argument we have emphasized so far set it apart from our ideal conception of dialogue. We do not believe, however, that argument and dialogue are incommensurate paradigms. They can inform one another. Henry Johnstone has highlighted some characteristics of argument that are not

typically considered and that serve to link the paradigms of argument and dialogue. He writes that argument introduces its participants "into a situation of risk in which open-mindedness and tolerance are possible."<sup>4</sup> Let us unpack some of the features of this conception of argument.

First, argument involves risk. For Johnstone, the participants in an argument always take the risk that they may have to change their selves. This is because argument is not simply the transmission of reasons by "minds that already exist and already inhabit the world."<sup>5</sup> Instead argument is "constitutive of those who participate in it."<sup>6</sup> Johnstone establishes that argument is not a means of effective control precisely because it does engage selves. If communication does not call into being a self--if it seeks control by means of "command," or "subliminal suggestion," or "hypnotic pass"--than for Johnstone that is not argument.

The second characteristic that Johnstone highlights is that argument involves open-mindedness and tolerance. Johnstone here parts from the traditional conception that an arguer's goal is to produce reasons that could not be refuted by counter-reasons. This would be the goal if argument were a means of controlling others, but Johnstone asserts that any reasons could be refuted by counter-reasons, so argument is not helpfully conceived as a set of strategies for manipulating others to a prescribed conclusion. The goal of argument, instead, is to facilitate open-mindedness and tolerance. This goal is best achieved, he

writes, when one maintains a "fervent commitment to his own arguments" and at the same time recognizes that "all of them can be met by counterarguments."<sup>7</sup> Argument becomes a means of constituting self and world, rather than the strategic manipulation of symbols to support a preconceived end.

This perspective does not deny the reason-giving function of argument. Indeed reason-giving itself is a constitutive activity. Though it is not the only constitutive use of language, one can easily imagine cases in which the creation of self and world depends on the kinds of claims, data, warrants, and good reasons called for by the staunchest of academic debaters. And nothing prohibits the integration of these traditional argumentative practices into dialogue, especially if they are practiced with the sense of tolerant open-mindedness encouraged by Johnstone.

### Dialogue

While speech communication departments regularly offer courses in argumentation, courses in dialogue are rare. This is not surprising. Dialogue, as a discourse form, cannot be "nailed down" as easily as argument. It is characterized by ongoing openness, and this makes precise formulation or pedagogical explication problematic. The problem is intensified because our students in general have inherited this culture's predisposition to argument and debate, and tend naturally to see difference in terms of a right-wrong duality. Thus a class in dialogue, rather

than teaching a new structure for conversation, must first unconceal the present paradigm, and consider its implications. In that process of unconcealment, what becomes available is a background of openness that makes dialogue possible.

The necessary conditions for dialogue are ontological, rather than epistemological. As generally practiced, argument is based upon the provision and reasoned use of evidence, and therefore draws upon what we know for its materials. But the attainment of dialogic openness is not a function of knowing; in fact, it demands a willingness not to know. Instead, an inquiry into the nature of dialogue focuses on one's way of being in a conversation. Such inquiry has a specific pedagogical intent: the goal is not merely to understand the relevant concepts, such as "openness"; but to develop a vocabulary of ideas which distinguish openness as an ontological possibility, and thereby make being open available as a way of being in a conversation.

Such a pedagogical goal demands a specific approach: rather than arriving at an understanding through a linear sequence of logical concepts, a series of ideas are discussed that together begin to distinguish the open area where dialogue may occur. In what follows we will summarize some of the ideas we have found useful for distinguishing that area. These ideas are not intended as categories or characteristics; as they are used in the course we are describing, they are intended collectively to suggest a possible way of being in a conversation.

### A constitutive view of language

As we have said, our interest in dialogue grew out of a concern for the inability of public discourse to create solutions beyond the two irreconcilable sides of an argument. If dialogue is to function creatively, it must begin from a recognition of the generative nature of language.

By now, the idea that language constitutes our reality rather than merely symbolizing it is not new to scholars of communication.<sup>8</sup> However, while a constitutive view of language is theoretically familiar for many of us, it presents a pedagogical challenge. We are all commonsense Cartesians: our apparent everyday reality is that language represents the meaningful objects that exist in the world, and this apparent reality is violated by the constitutive view. It asks us to consider that meaning and being arise in language, not before-- and language here means not simply words, but the interpretation of things that accompanies the words. A chair is a chair in language: chairs became possible when the interpretation "chair" was thought into language. For someone from a culture whose language has no such interpretation, the thing I am sitting on would not occur as a chair. Similarly, round flat objects began to occur as wheels at that point in history when the interpretation "wheel" was created. In the ontological clearing created by that languaging, those objects could thenceforth be wheels. Martin Heidegger's well-known statement of the situation is that "Language is the house of Being."<sup>9</sup> Or, in the words of

Albert Einstein: "It seems that the human mind has first to construct forms before we can find them in things."<sup>10</sup>

"Human rights" serves as another useful example of the generative function of language. For most of human history, human beings had no rights; rights were limited to the ruling class. But at some point, human thought created a new ontological possibility: humans as beings with rights. In the context of that new languaging, the possibility of being human was altered. Common sense may object that we always had the rights, we simply didn't recognize them. But the question must be asked, where were they before they became part of human reality? They were not hard-wired into our biology or psychology, nor were they free-floating in the atmosphere. But at some historical point, they were languaged into being, and live now in our culture's interpretation of the world.

The importance of a constitutive view of language for the study of dialogue lies in the essentially interactive nature of the constitutive function. This nature has been articulated most forcefully by Hans-Georg Gadamer: "It must be emphasized that language has its true being only in conversation, in the exercise of understanding between people. . . .It is a living process in which a community of life is lived out. . . .in linguistic communication, world is disclosed."<sup>11</sup> The languaging of human rights, then, did not occur as an isolated insight in the mind of an individual, but as the gradual process of a new ontological possibility coming into being in the conversations of a culture.

Between: the interhuman

Martin Buber, whose thinking is central to this project, has addressed at length the nature of the openness that dialogue demands. That openness, for Buber, constitutes the interhuman realm: the ontological space between human beings, which Buber distinguishes from the social space.<sup>12</sup> Socially, we are to some extent bound up together, and in our group interactions we relate with varying degrees of intimacy. But the interhuman is a realm of "existential relation," or relatedness at the level of being. The very notion of this level of relationship is alien to our usual way of looking at things. Its introduction into a pedagogical exploration of dialogue demands that students inquire into their own present way of being with others. In the inquiry, answers are not arrived at, but new questions are opened, and in the clearing of the new questions openness becomes available.

Transaction in the interhuman realm always exists as a possibility for human beings, but unlike social interaction it may be seldom realized. What are the conditions of the realization of the interhuman? "The only thing that matters," says Buber, "is that for each of the two men the other happens as the particular other, that each becomes aware of the other and is thus related to him in such a way that he does not regard and use him as his object, but as his partner in a living event. . . ."<sup>13</sup> Interhuman transactions demand being awake to one's conversational partner as one's partner. Buber emphasizes,

however, that interhuman relationship is not a psychological phenomenon. Certainly, each of us brings our psychological predispositions to the dialogue. But the realm of the interhuman arises only between people in interaction, and is always a shared phenomenon: "The sphere of the interhuman is one in which a person is confronted by the other. We call its unfolding the dialogical."<sup>14</sup>

### Seeming

Buber distinguishes a particular way of interacting with another that he calls seeming. As the term suggests, seeming is a mode of interaction in which my primary concern is myself and the impression I am making on the other person. I wish to be seen in a certain way, so I "produce a look" intended to be "the reflection of a personal life of such and such a kind."<sup>15</sup>

Seeming, says Buber, is a lie in relation to existence itself. When we live this lie, we forfeit "the great chance of a true happening between I and Thou."<sup>16</sup>

Buber has proposed a schema of human seemings--how I wish to appear to you, how I really appear to you, and how I appear to myself--that resembles the "perceived, presenting, and desired self" model found in many interpersonal communication textbooks.<sup>17</sup> All these "ghosts," says Buber, make authentic interaction problematic. In the context of an inquiry into dialogue, this idea demands further inquiry into our usual way of being with others, and into the nature of authenticity. It

allows students to consider that attachment to a position in argument may sometimes be a function of a desire to look good by being proven right, rather than a commitment to the position itself.

### Being present

The possibility of presence in human interaction is a profound question, one that must always be kept open, eschewing the closure of a definition. For Buber, being present is central to authentic relationship. Buber calls such authentic relations I Thou, and he distinguishes them from I-It relations, in which the other is objectified.<sup>18</sup> Objectification is always based in the past: I relate to you through the filter of my past experiences of you and people like you, of myself, of the world, and so forth. From these past experiences, I know "who you are." But in fact I know who you were; and through our filters made from the past we interact. Objects, says Buber, "subsist in time that has been."<sup>19</sup>

In an I-Thou relation, human beings are present to each other. Engaging the idea of presence evokes important thinking for students of dialogue. Clearly, we can all recall occasions when we have been physically present in a conversation but "a million miles away in our heads." But perhaps even what we normally call being present is a deficient mode; perhaps even then we are seeing the past. What would it be to free myself of my past evaluations and judgments of others, and be fully present

to their possibility? Is such presence possible, or even desirable? Certainly we must honor the past, but might it be determining our future in ways we do not recognize? The questions raised here lead to a thoughtful inquiry into the nature of human interaction.

### Suspending one's assumptions

Physicist David Bohm, who has written at length about the use of small group dialogue as a means of attaining "social intelligence," says that if dialogue is to be productive, participants must be willing to "suspend" their assumptions, literally holding them "as if suspended before us."<sup>20</sup> This way of looking at the situation is a powerful one for students of dialogue. It provides a useful metaphor for the ability to hold a point of view in such a way that one is able at the same time to consider others, an ability that is vital for dialogue.

### Thinking vs. having thoughts

Another valuable idea for students of dialogue is Bohm's distinction between the process of thinking, and the thoughts that are the products of that process.<sup>21</sup> Thinking, says Bohm, is an ongoing stream; access to this stream is available in dialogue, which he describes as "a free flow of meaning between people, in the sense of a stream that flows between two banks."<sup>22</sup> Thoughts, on the other hand, are like the leaves floating on the surface of the stream; they wash up onto the

banks and we have them as thoughts. We fail to recognize the stream of collective thinking from which they come, and therefore we interpret the thoughts as our own. We say "I think x," when "I have the thought that x" would be a more accurate statement of the situation.

When we disagree, then, it is worth considering that it is not you and I who disagree; the disagreement is between the thoughts we hold with which we have identified ourselves. Recognition of the collective and ongoing flow of thinking has an important effect on dialogue, says David Bohm:

A new kind of mind begins to come into being which is based upon the development of a common meaning. . . . People are no longer primarily in opposition more can they be said to be interacting, rather they are participating in this pool of common meaning, which is capable of constant development and change."<sup>23</sup>

And to keep the stream of thinking flowing smoothly, it is important to keep questions open.

#### The priority of the question

One of Gadamer's most important contributions to a exploration of dialogue is contained in the section of Truth and Method entitled "The Hermeneutical Priority of the Question," which Gadamer describes as an examination of "the logical structure of openness."<sup>24</sup> In this discussion, Gadamer develops several ideas that are valuable for an inquiry into dialogue.

Perhaps the most important is his suggestion that all experience has the structure of a question:

We cannot have experiences without asking questions. The recognition that an object is different and not as we first thought, obviously involves the question whether it was this or that. The openness that is part of experience is, from a logical point of view, precisely the openness of being this or that. It has the structure of a question. . . .To understand an opinion is to understand it as the answer to a question.<sup>25</sup>

This view permits an important freedom in discourse, by allowing us to hear opposing positions as different answers to a question. Thus in dialogue begin by working our way back to the common question, our shared ground of concern. "To understand a question means to ask it," says Gadamer.<sup>26</sup> Too often, we debate answers before we have truly engaged the question.

Gadamer also stresses that a willingness not to know is the fundamental precondition for authentic questioning:

There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what needs to be questioned. On the contrary, the example of Socrates teaches that the important thing is the knowledge that one does not know. Hence the Socratic dialectic, which leads, through its art of confusing the interlocutor, to this knowledge, sets up the presuppositions of the

question.<sup>27</sup>

But Gadamer points out that what prevents this authentic openness is "the power of opinion against which it is so hard to obtain an admission of ignorance."<sup>28</sup> In general, he suggests, our opinions are accompanied by a strong personal interest in their rightness: opinion "would always like to be the general opinion."<sup>29</sup>

How can we get beyond our tendency to positionality and defensiveness? One of Gadamer's suggestions is contained in his discussion of the nature of human insights, or "sudden ideas." Generally, we think of an insight--an "Aha!" experience--as the sudden appearance of an answer to a question which we had been pondering. But Gadamer asks us to consider these moments more deeply:

we also know that sudden thoughts do not come entirely unexpectedly. They always presuppose a pointer in the direction of an area of openness from which the idea can come, ie, they presuppose questions. The real nature of a sudden idea is perhaps less the solution to a problem than the sudden realization of the question that advances into openness and thus makes an answer possible.<sup>30</sup>

Thus an authentic questioning is essential for the openness that characterizes productive dialogue: "As against the solidity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid."<sup>31</sup>

### Pedagogical Applications

Several years ago one of us used an exercise that required students to create arguments and rebuttals about a particular proposal. The exercise involved dividing the class according to their positions on the issue of flag burning. Three people believed it should be legal, three believed it should be illegal, and twenty had no position; so the twenty were assigned at random to each "side" of the issue. The students conferred for about thirty minutes and then presented their arguments. Though the teacher in this case remembers nothing about the arguments themselves, he does remember the astounding and emotional dogmatism with which all of the students participated. Those who moments before were entirely unwilling to state a position on whether flag burning was protected speech now argued passionately for a particular side, and that side was determined solely by the professor's random choice.

Our goal in this class was not only to present a theoretical perspective that highlighted the value of dialogue, but also to involve students in the creation of public discourse that would yield something other than insistent adherence to a particular position. To accomplish this we designed four major course activities: public arguments (or debates), dialogue groups, public conversations, and major papers. These activities were done in conjunction with readings that explored the ideas discussed earlier in this paper. In this section of the paper, we will discuss each of these four main activities.

### Public arguments

We begin by asking students to indicate, on a two-page list of current controversial topics, both their positions on these topics and the strength of those positions, using two Likert response scales. This enables us to separate the class into debate teams of two people each, and to schedule teams to debate each other on a topic about which strong disagreement exists. Each student participates in one debate. The debates are organized to provide each team with time to explain their positions, to ask questions of the other team, to rebut the other team's contentions, and to conclude. Though we emphasize that the goal of the debates is not to "win," but to help the audience make an informed decision about the issue, the debates tend to revolve around the issue of winning, and to result in polarized positions.

We do not maintain that all public arguments must result in a polarization of opinions, but we do believe that the dominant form of public argument in our culture encourages such polarization. A cursory examination of the way any issue is managed in the contemporary political arena seems to bear out this conclusion. As Vicki Covington stated in a recent syndicated column, "When a new voice is heard, we slam it into a category. It's either right or left. Tolerant or intolerant. We have no ear for the beauty of dissonance. . . .In short, we're becoming a society of politicized zombies."<sup>32</sup>

The authors do not lay the blame for this state of affairs entirely at the feet of argument. Indeed, we want our students to embrace the productive elements of this paradigm (e.g., the helpful use of evidence and reasoning). But in the course we are describing here, by the time the entire class has engaged in their debates, they clearly recognize that this form of communication encourages participants to embrace their position as the "right position," and to defend it unflinchingly.

#### Dialogue groups

After the public arguments are completed, we introduce our students through reading and discussion to the ideas about dialogue presented earlier in this paper. We then put them into dialogue groups of about eight people, and assign each group a topic. As in the case of the public arguments, these groups are composed of students who embrace diverse and strongly held positions on their topic.

Each group meets on its own for at least a class period. Their assignment is to have a dialogue about their issue; this means being open to the possibility of suspending their assumptions, recognizing background questions, and constituting new ideas that transcend those previously held. The form of the dialogues is based on the native American tradition of council, which employs a talking stick.<sup>33</sup> Each group chooses some object that will designate whose turn it is to speak. The group sits in a circle and passes the object from person to person

around the circle; only the one holding the object may speak. When the speaker finishes, she passes the object to the next person. This ensures that no interruptions occur, and that various perspectives can be voiced without the dialogue becoming a contest of opposing views. Students who normally dominate discussions must listen to others as the object proceeds around the circle; students who normally don't participate in discussions are given an opening to articulate their ideas.

When positioned following the public arguments, as they are in this course, the dialogue groups demonstrate clearly the possibility of a type of communication that is nonargumentative, and that encourages multiple perspectives rather than a reduction to bipolar views. While the provision of reasons and evidence are still a part of this communication, they are not the exclusive criteria for judgment. Personal anecdotes and narratives also find a legitimacy in this format that they are not afforded in debate. This exercise helps students to recognize that various forms may be employed for discussion of difficult issues.

### Public conversations

The dialogue groups, however, are more useful for relatively small numbers of people than for discussions meant to involve the public at large. Since our concern is to enhance public conversation about controversial issues, we want our students to generate a form of talk that employs the positive aspects of

argument and dialogue and that is conducive to a public forum. To accomplish this, we once again separate the students into groups, and give them this assignment: have a public conversation about an issue that has generated controversy in our culture. The purpose of this exercise is for students to create a form for public conversation about controversial issues by drawing upon their experience and understanding of both argument and dialogue. This conversation should leave the audience better able to make a decision about the topic. We encourage the students to recognize whatever strong feelings they may have about the topic, but to explore questions in the conversation rather than defend their position. Each group engages in its conversation during one class period, with the class as its audience.

Because we want the students to create a unique communication format, this is all the instruction we give them regarding the form of their public conversation. We emphasize that they are to make this up, and that they should be creative in doing so. At the same time, we do require that they be well-informed about their topic: each student must consult at least five sources in preparation for the conversation, and must turn in a one-page summary of information from each source, along with a list of two to four questions central to the controversy surrounding the topic.

The groups in our recent class developed various approaches to public conversation, some more successful than others. In one of the more interesting formats, group members used the council

form for one turn around the circle; this allowed each member to express his or her ideas on the issue. The discussion was then opened to the entire class, returning to the council form whenever a lull occurred in the conversation. This format enabled group members and class members to explore the issue in a relatively non-threatening and productive fashion.

### Major papers

The value of these exercises became especially clear as we read the students' final papers. We asked students to compare and contrast the debate and dialogue experiences they had read about, discussed, observed, and participated in during the class. They were not to defend debate or dialogue as a preferred discourse form, but to examine the strengths and weaknesses of each and to consider how both could inform a perspective that would encourage productive talk about difficult issues. In their papers, students addressed a variety of interesting questions. They explored ways the formats were similar and different; how they influenced communication, thinking, and knowledge; how learning about argument influenced their perspective toward dialogue, and vice-versa; and how the two formats could be integrated into a form of public conversation.

Though many students dealt well with these kinds of theoretical issues, some of the most interesting insights came from their own experiences. One student, for example, wrote of a group member "who was far less threatening in the dialogue group

than in the previous public argument. The dialogue format allowed him the freedom to move into the so-called gray area: thus he didn't have to defend [his position]." Another student, who was in a dialogue group on abortion, wrote, "I went into the group with basically just my opinion and my facts, not believing for a second that they could be changed. To my surprise, I came out of the group with more information and new questions and a lot less of an idea [about] where I stand on the topic. To me this was a very positive experience."

In sum, the papers allowed student to examine the connections among the theoretical ideas and practical activities we explored in this course, breaking down the division between theory and practice that often plagues academic work. What they saw, in general, was the possibility of non-polarized discourse on difficult issues. The authors believe that this possibility should be high on the agenda of our discipline.

## Notes

1. Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death (New York: Penguin Books, 1985): 49, 51, 63.
2. Wayne Brockriede, "Where is Argument?," Journal of the American Forensic Association 11 (1975): 180.
3. Richard E. Crable, "Knowledge as Status: On Argument and Epistemology," Communication Monographs 49 (1982): 249-262.
4. Henry W. Johnstone Jr., "Some Reflections on Argumentation," in Johnstone and Maurice Natanson, eds., Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965): 7.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 6.
7. Ibid., 7-8.
8. For an early expression of this idea in a speech communication journal, see Stanley Deetz, "Words Without Things: Toward a Social Phenomenology of Language," Quarterly Journal of Speech 59 (1973): 40-51. The work of John Stewart has also been important in developing this perspective, most recently in Articulate Contact (Albany: SUNY Press, in press).
9. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell (NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 193. The examples of the wheel, the chair, and human rights are drawn from the work of Werner Erhard, whose rhetoric I examined at length elsewhere. See Richard Bruce Hyde, "Saying the Clearing: A Heideggerian Analysis of the Ontological Rhetoric of Werner Erhard." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1991.
10. Albert Einstein, Ideas and Opinions (NY: Crown, 1982), 266.
11. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (NY: Crossroad, 1988), 401-411.
12. Martin Buber, "Elements of the Interhuman," in The Knowledge of Man (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press, 1988), 62-65.
13. Ibid., 64.
14. Ibid., 65.

15. Martin Buber, "Being and Seeming," in The Knowledge of Man, 66.
16. Ibid., 67.
17. See, for example, Ronald B. Adler and Neil Towne, Looking Out, Looking In, sixth ed. (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart & Winston), 59.
18. Martin Buber, I and Thou (NY: Collier, 1987), 12. John Stewart and Milt Thomas have used "presentness" as one of the characteristics of dialogic listening. See Stewart and Thomas, "Dialogic Listening: Sculpting Mutual Meanings," in Bridges Not Walls, ed. John Stewart, (NY: McGraw Hill, 1989), 201.
19. Buber, I and Thou, 13.
20. Bohm's views are usefully summarized by Peter Senge in The Fifth Discipline (NY: Doubleday, 1990), 238-249.
21. Senge, The Fifth Discipline, 241-242.
22. Ibid., 240.
23. Ibid., 241.
24. Gadamer, Truth and Method, 325-341.
25. Ibid., 325, 338.
26. Ibid., 338.
27. Ibid., 326.
28. Ibid., 329.
29. Ibid., 329.
30. Ibid., 329.
31. Ibid., 330.
32. Vicki Covington, "Left and Right are Zombifying Us All," Minnapolis Star Tribune 18 July 1994: 9A.
33. See R. Bruce Hyde, "Council: Using a Talking Stick to Teach Listening," The Speech Communication Teacher 7 (Winter 1993): 1-2.