

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

RUNNING HEAD: STUDY OF DIALOGUE

A Study of Dialogue in a Multi-Stakeholder Participatory Evaluation Project

Jaclynne Neri

Supervisor: Dr. John Sylvestre

University of Ottawa

© Jaclynne Neri, Ottawa, Canada, 2012

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all those who participated in this study and thank you to my lab-mates who assisted with the data collection. Also, thank you to my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. John Sylvestre, who was instrumental throughout this entire process. Finally, thank you to my Thesis Committee Members, Dr. Tim Aubry and Dr. Susan Farrell, for all of your guidance, support and input.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	II
Table of Contents.....	III
Dedication.....	IV
1. Abstract.....	1
2. Introduction and Literature Review.....	2
3. Context & Current Study.....	12
4. Methods.....	13
3.1 Participants & Sampling.....	14
3.2 Data Collection & Data Analysis.....	15
5. Results.....	18
6. Discussion.....	31
7. Conclusion.....	37
8. References.....	40
9. Appendixes	
8.1 Appendix A: Table 1. <i>Description of Factors within a Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue</i>	42
8.2 Appendix B:Figure 1. <i>A model mapping the process of a multiple stakeholder dialogue</i>	46

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family members and friends, who have stood by me, supported me and always encouraged me, during my thesis and my academic career. Also, this thesis is dedicated to my loving husband and life-long friend. Without these wonderful people, this thesis would not have been completed.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I am most grateful and truly blessed to have you all in my life.

Abstract

Many things can be communicated through dialogue, including information, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs and personal experiences. More recently, dialogues have been used in focus group research and in program evaluations. Despite the increasing prevalence of dialogue in research and evaluation, much is still unknown about dialogue, especially how dialogue emerges and occurs within a group setting. The aim of the current study was to describe and identify the various factors involved in a dialogue, examine the relationships among these factors, and conceptualize the process of dialogue within a multi-stakeholder participatory evaluation. A qualitative analysis of three focus groups, each comprised of eight to ten participants, yielded several findings. First, several factors were found to help facilitate the interactions between multiple stakeholders in dialogue, including the development of common ground and specific contributions made by participants. Secondly, communication within these multiple stakeholder groups was found to alternate between two individuals, a dyadic exchange, or between multiple participants, a complex exchange. Thirdly, the moderator and participants were found to take on each other roles. Finally, from these conversations, a model was developed to illustrate the progression of a dialogue in these groups. These results have many implications for program evaluators, focus group leaders, and other practitioners in the field.

A study of dialogue in a participatory evaluation

In the simplest terms, a dialogue is an exchange or conversation between two or more individuals. More recently, dialogues have become a tool or medium to engage individuals in different kinds of discussions. For instance, dialogues have been used in businesses, in organizations and in politics (Seikkuta, & Arnkil, 2006). In psychology, dialogues have been used in multiple domains such as individual and family therapy (Anderson, 2007), psychotherapy and psychosocial work (Seikkuta, & Arnkil, 2006), in medical and professional networks (Seikkuta, & Arnkil, 2006), in social science and health research (Moen, Antonov, Lars, Nilsson, & Ring, 2010; Williams & Ayres 2007; Lehoux, Poland, & Daudelin, 2006), in focus group research (Myers 1998; Hyden & Bulow, 2003; Kitzinger, 1994; Duggleby, 2005; Gronkaer, Curtis, de Crespigny, & Delmar, 2011; Fay, Garrod, & Carletta, 2000; Branigan, 2006; Branigan, Pickering, McLean, & Cleland, 2007), in linguistics research (O'Connell, Kowal, & Kaltenbacher, 1990; Schegloff, 2000) and in program evaluation (Greene, 2001; House & Howe, 2000; Preskills, & Torres, 1999; Ryan, & DeStefano, 2000).

Despite the recent surge in the use of dialogue in different research domains, much is still unknown about this approach. For example, there is no consensus concerning the definition of dialogue, and little research has been done concerning the contributing factors which facilitate dialogue. As well, not much is known about the processes that occur within a dialogue, such as who communicates with whom, or what kinds of statements generate discussion among group members. Therefore, the current study aimed to examine some of these issues within the context of a participatory research evaluation project. There were three goals to this study: 1) to identify and describe the various factors involved in dialogue; 2) to examine the role of these factors in the dialogue and understand their relationships to each other; and finally, 3) to map the process of the dialogue among the multiple stakeholders. The research questions, which stemmed from

these over-arching goals, are: 1) What does dialogue look like in a participatory evaluation with multiple stakeholders?; 2) What contributions in the dialogue aid to the development of a common ground?; and 3) How do group members interact in a multi-stakeholder dialogue?.

This study has several implications for program evaluators, focus group facilitators, and other practitioners in the field. They include clarifying what dialogue looks like within a multi-stakeholder, participatory evaluation and identifying the role that facilitators play. As well, the findings of this study may assist focus group facilitator in generating common ground among group members and in creating group cohesiveness.

The subsequent section reviews the relevant literature on dialogue. The main focus of this review is to identify existing factors within a dialogue and to outline the processes involved in a developing dialogue. First, the literature of dialogue in evaluation is examined, followed by the various factors founds within dialogue, which included the development of common ground, contributions to the common ground, interactions between group members and the roles of the moderator and participants. Finally, the process of dialogue is examined. The literature review concludes with a critical summary, followed by a description of the context for the current study.

Literature Review

Dialogue in Evaluations

Within evaluations, dialogue has become a popular practice that has captured the attention of many in the field. Despite the increasing prevalence of dialogue in evaluation, many evaluators are confused as to “what dialogue is, whether there is more than one kind of dialogue, and what it can do for evaluation is not clear” (Ryan & DeStefano, 2000, p.63). To date, there are multiple ways in which dialogue is approached, incorporated or employed in different types of evaluations. For instance, there is a *Socratic dialogue* (Karlsson, 2001), dialogue as a *hermeneutic perspective* (Widdershoven, 2001), dialogue as part of a *Deliberative Democratic*

Evaluation (House & Howe, 2000), dialogue as *Collective Inquiry* (Preskills & Torres, 1999), and dialogue as a *Relational Perspective* (Greene, 2001). These latter two forms of dialogue will be described in greater detail, since they fit more closely with the current participatory evaluation study.

Collective inquiry and dialogue. *Collective Inquiry* evaluation focuses on generating a mutual understanding between all stakeholders and the evaluator. In a collective inquiry evaluation, the dialogue assists with the inquiry process among all relevant stakeholders. It “facilitates the evaluative inquiry learning process of reflection, asking questions and identifying and clarifying values, beliefs, assumptions and knowledge” (Perskill & Torres, 1999, p.53). Within this kind of dialogue, the evaluator can assume multiple roles including: “collaborator, facilitator, interpreter, mediator and coach” (Ryan & DeStefano, 2000, p.67). In *Collective Inquiry*, although there may still be agreement and disagreement, there is no requirement to reach consensus. Thus, the main goal of this dialogue is to gather information and explore group members’ thoughts, feelings, opinions and experiences.

A relational perspective and dialogue. For Greene (2001), dialogue in evaluation is based on the *engagement* of stakeholders and the interactions of the evaluator. From this relational perspective, dialogue “directly engages the moral-ethical and politicized power relationships among stakeholders”. Based on these values, Greene (2001) posited an ideal for what she called “dialogic evaluation”. For this kind of dialogue in evaluation, several factors should be present. First, all legitimate stakeholders should participate and engaged in “sharing” and “reciprocal understanding” and the development “collective perspectives on meaning” through dialogue. Secondly, the dialogue should be “respectful”, “equitable” and embrace a range of “expertise and knowledge”. Finally, like the dialogue in a *Collective Inquiry* evaluation, the achievement of consensus among group members is not necessary for a successful dialogue.

According to Greene (2001), the “essence of dialogue in evaluation is the reciprocal exchange and education among stakeholders about their diverse interests and values, towards legitimizing differences and equalizing voice”.

In general, Collective Inquiry and Relational Perspective evaluations use dialogue as a vehicle or tool to discover, to share, and to develop meaning among stakeholders. Within these types of dialogues, individuals ask questions, provide personal experiences, impart knowledge, and respectfully agree or disagree with one another. Notwithstanding, as beneficial and useful as these dialogues are to evaluation, they tend to only outline what should occur or happen within a dialogue. Neither one posits how these goals are to be achieved in the dialogue, nor do they illustrate how participants talk to one another. Also, it is unclear how the moderator facilitates these kinds of dialogues. As well, the processes that generate dialogue are also unknown.

In an effort to understand some of the factors mentioned in these dialogues in evaluation, literature from focus group research was reviewed. More specifically, factors such as common ground, contributions to the common ground, interactions between group members and the roles of the moderator and participants. Each of these will be described in turn below.

Elements of dialogues

Development of common ground. Perhaps most important within a dialogue is the existence of a common understanding or common knowledge among group members. In the focus group literature, Hyden, and Bulow’s (2003) research on common ground is well known and often cited. For these authors, the *communicative common ground* is what group members have in common or what they collectively create and understand together during the dialogue. This *communicative common ground* can be established in several ways: 1) It may be found in the topics or tasks presented by the moderator, or, 2) it may surface as commonalities between the group members such as similar experiences, ideas, thoughts and feelings. For instance,

participants may identify with other group members based on their group membership as professionals or as having similar life experiences (Hyden & Bulow, 2003).

A similar definition of *common ground* is posited by Branigan (2006). According to her, common ground can be described as a “set of knowledge, beliefs and assumptions” (p. 154) that group members have, or think they have, in common with one another. In order for something to be “grounded”, (p.115) or accepted into the common ground, participants must illustrate their comprehension of what was previously said in the dialogue. For instance, as a way of demonstrating their understanding, participants may make certain statements like agreement, disagreements or relevant responses to what another group member said. In this sense, a common ground can be viewed as an achievement among group members in the dialogue. According to Branigan (2006), once a piece of information has been entered into the common ground, it becomes general knowledge that is accessible to all group members.

From these definitions, it appears that common ground is dynamic and ever-changing throughout the course of a dialogue. It is not “fixed” (Branigan, 2006) and it fluctuates depending on the statement an individual contributes to the dialogue. Therefore, the common ground needs to be constantly nurtured by all participants involved in the dialogue. However, sometimes common ground is not nurtured and therefore does not exist within a dialogue. For example, although an individual may make a contribution to the conversation, this statement may not be related to the already developed common ground, or other group members may not relate to or comprehend the statement.

Likewise, some statements made by group members may be too general or specific in relation to the topic or common ground. For instance, if a statement is based on a unique personal experience or is more global or broad in context, other group members may not be able to relate to these ideas. If this occurs, there is the likelihood that common ground will not be

developed. Hyden and Bulow (2003) state that if a contribution is “left unanswered and gets almost no support might indicate that it was too personal and thus far too unique to function as a common ground for co-producing narratives in the group” (p.318). However, not all general or specific statements may alienate other group members or affect the development of common ground. Hyden and Bulow (2003) suggest that personal statements, although specific to one individual, can be reflective of other group members’ experiences. Similarly, general or broad statements could emulate how individuals in the dialogue view themselves or their experiences as a whole group.

Several studies illustrate how general or specific statements affect the creation of common ground. Lehoux and colleagues (2006) studied dialogues among patients using “high-tech home care interventions” such as “antibiotic intravenous therapy, parenteral nutrition, peritoneal dialysis, and oxygen therapy”. They found that some of the patients’ contributions to the conversation were not supported by other group members. As well, they noted that a few individuals tended to dominate the dialogue and control the development of the common ground. These findings suggest that the statements made by the patients were probably too specific or dissimilar to other group members’ experiences. The authors concluded that if common ground was created it would “never fully capture the patients’ experiential, technical and clinical knowledge” (p. 2100).

Similarly, Moen, Antonov, Lars, Nilsson, and Ring (2010) conducted dialogues with groups of older patients, who were above sixty-five years of age and who used five or more medications. The authors found that the group of older patients did not establish common ground because the patients “chose individual approaches, using biographical narratives of lived experience to express their attitudes” and made comments that were either too personal or too general for other group members to relate to. For instance, the patients asked questions about

their specific medications, or talked about their personal experiences with illness or health care services. If these kinds of situations occur, where common ground is not formulated, it can affect the “groupness” (Hyden & Bulow, 2003, p.318) or cohesiveness of the group. Hyden and Bulow (2003) state that if participants do not establish a common ground, they fail to come together as a group, thereby acting only as individuals with a common focus, rather than cohesive members of a group.

Contributions to the common ground. Once common ground has been achieved, individuals can participate in the dialogue in many different ways. By making a contribution to the common ground, participants help to re-establish a particular common ground topic, or they can widen the scope of the common ground to include other related ideas. According to Hyden and Bulow (2003), participants can add to the common ground by making diverse responses such as supporting or agreeing with a speaker, referring to previous statements, and constructing ideas, topics and stories together as a group.

When deciding what information to add or share with the group, some researchers have posited that participants may use a concept called *audience design*. First defined by Bell (1984), an *audience design* occurs when speakers “design their message with their addressee in mind” (as cited in Branigan, 2006, p. 160). In other words, a speaker will think about how to present his or her ideas to the group, given the background, intellect, context and focus of the group. In contrast, other researchers disagreed with the audience design. They state that participants cannot always respond with their audience in mind, either because the discussion happens so quickly, or because they simply, and unintentionally, forget about their intended audience. Some researchers, like Branigan (2006), suggest that both points of view may be valid, depending on the group size and context. For example, Branigan (2006) noted that it would not be uncommon for speakers to use audience design in dialogue; however, for multi-party dialogues, the audience

design is likely to be harder to accomplish because of the potential group diversity. Therefore, participants within multi-party dialogues may be more inclined to present “simpler messages that require less collaboration for adequate understanding” (Branigan, 2006, p. 172). The message that is sent and how it is perceived and received could have a profound effect on the development of the common ground and the engagement among group members.

Interactions between group members and group size

Much of the research conducted on dialogues and focus groups has used small groups of six to eight participants. To date, little research using larger groups or groups with dissimilar members has been conducted. Some researchers have suggested that the size of group affects dialogue, and how group members communicate with each other. For example, Fay, Garrod, and Carletta (2000) found that the size of the focus group influenced the communication and decision making processes among group members. In small groups of five participants, participants tended to agree with others with whom they interacted. Despite this finding, participants were not necessarily influenced or swayed by the person who contributed the most in the dialogue. Conversely, in a large group of ten participants, the reverse was found. In larger groups, members tended to agree with the individual who spoke the most, and they were not often influenced by the group members with whom they interacted.

In terms of communication processes or the interactions among group members, the size of the group may also play a role. For instance, Fay et al (2000) found that in smaller groups, the group members tended to communicate more bilaterally, or in other words, dialoguing in pairs or establishing consensus with others. Participants in larger groups, on the other hand, tended to communicate more unilaterally, by sharing information with the entire group. The authors also reported that “speakers in large groups formulate what they say to be understood by the wider

audience, whereas speakers in small groups are only sensitive to their current conversation partner” (p.485).

The process of dialogue. To date, there has been little description of how a dialogue progresses or unfolds in a group setting. Some researchers have identified various factors that could influence dialogue such as situational factors (Vicsek, 2001), contextual factors (Hollander, 2004), and sociological factors (Lehoux, Poland, & Daudelin, 2006). However, none of these studies proposed a model or diagram outlining the potential progression of a dialogue. The only reference found that described how a dialogue functions was couched in a description of participants partaking in a collaboration. Clark and Schaefer (as cited in Branigan, 2006), suggested that there is a two stage process of collaboration between speakers in a conversation. In the first stage, an individual makes a statement to another individual, who then must consider its relevance to the discussion. In the second stage, the receiver of the statement must then “accept” the statement, in terms of its relevance or contributions to the conversation (as cited in Branigan, 2006, p. 155). According to Clark and Schaefer, in order for the speaker to show that the statement was accepted, he or she should provide “positive evidence” (as cited in Branigan, 2006, p. 155) as a form of feedback. This “positive evidence” can occur in four different ways: a) the addressee can continue to attend to the speaker; b) the addressee can produce a new contribution; c) the addressee may acknowledge what was said and d) the addressee might repeat the speaker’s words verbatim (as cited in Branigan, 2006).

Summary of the literature. From this literature review, it is apparent that dialogue is used in a variety of areas, from evaluation to focus group research. By examining the research, several key components of dialogue were found including: common ground, contributions made to the common ground, exchanges between participants and the role of moderator. However, these studies do not provide a clear picture of the factors that are present within dialogues.

Likewise, this research does not sufficiently describe what dialogue looks like or how it occurs. Thus, the current study aims to describe the processes that occurred in a multi-stakeholder dialogue, and outline the key components that contribute to the creation of the dialogue.

Context of the Current Study

The current study is part of larger on-going project entitled the HousingPlus Collaborative Communities Project (HPCC). Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the City of Ottawa, the HPCC project was developed in order to evaluate and improve the implementation of supportive housing programs in Ottawa. *Supportive housing* is defined as “social programs offering group living options to those requiring support to live independently” (Sylvestre, Cousins, Sundar, Aubry, & Hinsperger, 2008, p.1). This type of housing is associated with congregated settings, such as large converted homes, or a cluster of rooms in an apartment building (Sylvestre, et al., 2008). It offers professional support that is provided within the residence, such as rehabilitation, group decision making, life skills, and conflict resolution (Parkinson, Nelson, & Hogan, 1999). In total, nine local supportive housing agencies agreed to collaborate on this project. These supportive housing agencies assist a variety of tenants from various backgrounds including those suffering from mental illness, individuals who were homeless and families at risk of becoming homeless, women and children leaving violent situations, and individuals with HIV and AIDS.

For the HPCC study, a Collaborative Community group was formed. The Collaborative Community group consisted of staff members and tenant representatives from the nine supportive housing agencies and members of the research team. The research team consisted of two university professors and several graduate and undergraduate university students. The author of this thesis was the project co-ordinator for the HPCC study and she assisted with the Collaborative Community dialogues and data collection. The main goal of this group was to

assist in the development of guiding principles for best supportive housing practices. This goal was to be achieved through collaborative dialogues (Sylvestre, et al., 2007). The findings from these focus groups were used to develop a questionnaire to survey Supporting Housing practices, which was distributed to staff members and tenants within all of the participating agencies.

The Current Study

The current study is a qualitative analysis of multi-stakeholder dialogues from the HPCC evaluation. The main purpose of this study was to describe what dialogue looks like. In order to accurately describe dialogue within a participatory evaluation context, this study also aimed to illustrate how dialogue is achieved among group members and what characteristics influence or hinder the development of common ground. Three over-arching research questions were used to guide the analyses: 1) What does dialogue look like in a participatory evaluation with multiple stakeholders?; 2) What characteristics aid in the development of common ground?; 3) How do group members interact in a multi-stakeholder dialogue?.

Methods

In order to analyze dialogues in these focus groups, a general inductive analytic approach, influenced by grounded theory, was used. In particular, an inductive approach was used to analyze the data, so that the “patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data” directly (Patton, 1990, p. 390). Thus, the coding schemes were developed from the data itself, rather than from pre-conceived theories or themes (Alvesson, & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 22). Some *sensitizing concepts*, defined as important concepts that aid in the conceptualization of the coding scheme, (Patton, 1990) were gleaned from the literature to assist with the data analyses. These sensitizing concepts included *turns*, *communicative common ground*, *contributions to the common ground* (Hyden, & Bulow, 2003), *interactions* between participants (Kitzinger, 1994;

Duggleby, 2005;) and the *role of the moderator* (Gronkaer, Curtis, de Crespigny, & Delmar, 2011). These concepts will be further explained when the analysis progresses.

Participants and Sampling

Participants in this study included a variety of stakeholders from nine local supportive housing agencies. Approximately twenty-five individuals participated during this first phase of the HPCC study. Staff members and tenants from various supportive housing agencies were asked to participate so that a range of perspectives and experiences could be heard. Since the main focus of these dialogues was to promote collaboration among stakeholders in supportive housing in Ottawa, tenants and staff members were combined in the focus groups.

Participant recruitment for the HPCC evaluation was assisted by the executive directors of the participating agencies. The executive directors were also stakeholders and part of the evaluation's Steering Committee. Using a script provided by the research team, the directors asked their staff members and tenants if they would be interested in participating in the HPCC evaluation. For these focus groups, an attempt was made to recruit at least two staff members and two tenant representative from each of the nine agencies. However, since some staff members and tenants did not attend all of the focus group sessions, new representatives were sometimes invited to participate.

Data Collection

In total, seven meetings were held during this phase of the project over a nine month period. Each meeting lasted about two and a half hours. All of the meetings were held at the University of Ottawa. The first meeting was held as an introductory session in order to ensure that the participants were there voluntarily and that they understood the goals of the project. At this time, those who wanted to participate in the evaluation study were asked to sign a consent form. At each subsequent meeting, all participants were reminded about their role as study

participants, the voluntary nature of the study and confidentiality. The tenant participants received a twenty-five dollar honorarium each time they attended a meeting.

On average, twenty individuals were present at each focus group session. In some cases, other staff or tenant representatives were sent to participate in the sessions if one of the original members could not attend. At the start of each session, the principal investigator of the evaluation gave a brief presentation of the day's discussion topic and provided feedback from the previously focus group session. Then, the staff members and tenants were randomly assigned to one of two smaller focus groups. Although care was taken to ensure that tenants and staff members from the same agency were not in the same group, this did occur in some cases. The two smaller focus groups were conducted by either the principal investigator, who was a male university professor, or by a female university professor. Each moderator conducted his or her small group using identical, semi-structured focus group guidelines, which included the topic for discussion and questions. Each small group discussion lasted for about an hour and a half. All of the focus groups were audio recorded, and field notes were also kept. Each focus group discussed was transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

In order to explore the factors involved in a multi-stakeholder dialogue and to map out how a dialogue takes place, a qualitative analysis of three focus groups was conducted. Two of the focus groups were from the first focus group session following the introductory meeting and the third focus group was session number four, almost mid-way through the nine month period. These focus group dialogues were chosen for several reasons. These two initial focus groups were selected because they shared the same discussion topics though they had different moderators. One focus group was conducted by the principal investigator, and the other group was conducted by the female investigator. The third focus group was conducted only by the

principal investigator and it had a different discussion topic. On the whole, these sessions were chosen to see if there were any differences between moderators, between topics or over time. Each focus group dialogue was treated as an independent case study. This practice of analyzing and comparing focus groups as independent cases is a common practice within qualitative analyses (Patton, 1990).

The main goal of the analysis of these focus group dialogues was to identify the key elements of the dialogues and to describe the processes that occur within a dialogue. During the analytic process, multiple phases of analyses were conducted. More specifically, the phases included: (1) identifying themes and subthemes, (2) building and applying codes, (3) describing phenomenon, (4) making comparisons, and (5) creating and validating models. Each of these phases will be described in turn.

In the first phase, identifying themes and subthemes, each of the dialogues were read through once and were then divided into segments. These segments were defined as periods of conversation which were devoted to a single topic that was introduced by the moderator. Within each of these segments, instances of different conversation patterns, or who talked with whom, were identified. It was noted that these conversation patterns or structures occurred between two individuals or among several individuals. These two conversation patterns were the main overarching themes from which other themes or codes were developed.

In the second phase, building and applying codes, an inductive analysis of the actions of participants was conducted within each of the segments. In order to name and identify emerging themes or subthemes within each segment of dialogue, open coding was used. During open coding, several conceptual coding categories were created such as: statements made by participants; interactions among participants; conversation patterns; and the flow of the dialogue. By using a method of constant comparison between the raw data and the emerging coding

scheme (Flick, 2002), a preliminary set of categories was created. These initial categories were further refined and verified with the author's thesis supervisor. As the analysis progressed, several codes were modified or combined and an audit trail concerning the changes was maintained.

In order to make comparisons between the categories and themes developed in the open coding phase, an axial coding approach was used. Axial coding is “the process of relating subcategories to a category” (Strauss, and Corbin, 1990, p. 114). In this phase, the subcategories concerning the actions or contributions of the group members, and both moderators, were related to one another, and then compared to conversation patterns or structures. To illustrate these potential relationships, a model was developed. In order to test the model, the model and its categories were applied to all of the focus group dialogues. Here the analysis goes back to phase one and two, where new concepts are derived and new categories are developed. Using the method of constant comparison, the model was revised until no new concepts emerged. The final themes and coding categories that are relevant to the model are included in Table 1 (Appendix A). Throughout all of these phases, an audit trail was maintained and research notes documenting the coding process were kept.

Results

The goals of the present study were to describe what dialogue looks like in a multi-stakeholder participatory evaluation and to illustrate the various factors that contribute to the development of common ground. The qualitative analysis yielded notable findings that will be described in three following sections. In the first section, a model of the overall process of dialogue will be explained.. This model was created from an overall analysis of the relationships between the factors involved in the dialogues and the patterns of conversations between the participants and the moderator. This model demonstrates how all of elements of a dialogue are intertwined in a

complex, three-pronged process. The second part of this results section provides examples of all of the fundamental factors present within these dialogues and illustrates how they assist in developing the common ground. The final part of this section shows the patterns of contributions that participants and moderators made, and depicts the ways in which they interacted with one another.

Developing a Model of Dialogue

Findings from the qualitative analysis suggest that dialogue is a multi-faceted, co-created, and an ever-evolving social achievement. In an effort to explain the process and characteristics of a dialogue in multiple stakeholder groups, a model was created, as shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure1 about Here

This model was developed by examining the various contributions made by participants and moderators (e.g. agreeing, clarifying, and querying statements) to see if there were any consistencies or patterns as to when these statements were made in the dialogue. As well, the dialogues were reviewed to see if there were any links between the types of statements made and the exchanges between the participants and the moderators. More specifically, this model outlines the main steps in the dialogical process, and illustrates how the various factors are involved in the development of common ground. The section below describes the model in detail. This model will also be used to explain the findings in subsequent sections.

The model of a dialogue. This model attempts addresses the first research question: 1) *What does dialogue look like in a participatory evaluation with multiple stakeholders.* This complex model consists of several steps, which will be described in turn. The first step in the model illustrates how a dialogue begins. The dialogical process begins with an *open statement* in

the form of a question that is posited to all group members. The question is usually general enough to allow for a response from anyone in the group. This *open statement* is a way to situate the conversation, or to specify the topic. For the most part, the results from this study indicate that the moderators exclusively made these open statements. For example, one moderator asked a group of participants this open statement: “Okay, so the first question is what does good housing do for me? What do people think?” This definition of an *open statement* is similar to Myers’ (1998), concept of introducing or opening a topic. The main difference between these two definitions is that, for this study, an *open statement* includes the idea of posing a question that was open to the entire group. As well, an open statement can be made as a means to change the topic of conversation, to open a current conversation to all of the members of the dialogue, and to re-introduce a topic if it fails to generate common ground among participants.

Once the moderator poses an *open statement*, there is the opportunity for one of the participants to respond. In step two of the model, participants involved in the dialogue can produce several kinds of responses, including single statements; statements that refer to or build onto what another participant said; querying statements; clarifying statements and agreeing or disagreeing statements. Each of these contributions or statements will be described fully later on in the results section. On the whole, the findings of this study indicate that these contributions have the potential to develop and increase the common ground. Also, each one of these statements or contributions had the potential to influence or follow one another in a dialogue. For example, if a participant made a single statement, a moderator or another participant might have asked a querying statement in order to gain clarity or acquire more information. The following excerpt illustrates this process between contribution statements, demonstrated by a participant and a moderator:

P2¹: It provides, ummm resources to allow you to eventually to become independent.

M: Okay, so how do you mean, what do you mean resources ?

P2: Like resources and ummm, that help you out with ummm say cost of schooling or ummm ah ummm gives you ummm information on like the food banks, it gives you information on where ah you can get ah furniture and stuff like that for reasonable costs.

M: Okay, how does that happen? Is it just through the support or is it through talking with other people that live in the same area, or how does that...?

The ability of these contribution statements to promote common ground or to develop other contribution responses is depicted in the model by the bi-direction arrows.

Each contribution statement is part of an exchange between various members of the group participating in the dialogue. These exchanges can be categorized as either an exchange between two individuals (e.g. two participants or a participants and a moderator), or as an exchange occurring between more than two individuals, which can include multiple participants, or a mixture of participants and the moderator. The former is referred to as a dyadic structure, while the latter is called a complex structure. These dyadic or complex structures depict who talks with whom in the dialogue. Any kind of contributing statement, such as agreeing, clarifying, querying or referring to statement, can be classified as being a dyadic or complex structure. This potential is illustrated in the model by the line-segment box adjacent to the contributing statements.

During this step of the dialogue process, facilitating statements also occurred. These facilitating statements helped to guide the participants' responses and to direct the general flow of the dialogue. Facilitating statements include: acknowledging, prompting and directing statements. These are described in greater detail later in the results section. In essence, these facilitating statements sometimes occurred among the contribution statements, and both the moderator and participants partook in producing these kinds of statements. The influence of

¹ M= Moderator; P2= Participant two

these facilitating statements on the contributions made by the group members is illustrated by the unidirectional arrows from the facilitating statement triangle at the bottom of the diagram.

The third major step of the model illustrates a continuous cycle between the contributions made by the moderator and participants and the creation of the common ground. In this part of the process, the contributing statements mentioned previously can either strengthen or expand the common ground. If a contributing statement is accepted into the common ground, then the cycle of responding and interactive exchanges between group members begins again. This reciprocal exchange between the contributing statements and the common ground are depicted by the bi-directional arrows in the model. In the example below, the idea of maintenance inspections is entered into the common ground, and other participants agree with this idea and shared their own experiences:

P7: Our place at (name of housing agency), we have room checks about like once or twice a week just to make sure we keep up on our maintenance and ah ah keep our place tidy, it's like ah, you know it's just ah to help you ah with life skills

M: So, so you only get inspections once or twice a week? Do you know what the _____ (intelligible) are looking for?

P6: Ah they're just there just looking at the cleanliness.

F: Do you know they are coming back at a time, and ah?

P6: Yes.

P2: We have three month inspections, in our building.

P1: Yeah, we do too.

P2: Which is smart ...

The final step of the model indicates that sometimes participants' responses were unable to generate common ground. Also, it illustrates the point when a topic of conversation needs to be changed. At this point in the process, the findings of the study suggest that, in most cases, another open statement would be issued by the moderator. Notwithstanding, most of the opening statements were successful in generating an on-topic response from the participants. These responses to the open statements enabled a topic to be grounded, typically within the specific experience of a respondent. For example:

M: Okay, so the first question is what does good housing do for me? What do people think?

P1: Well, I have a small we're in a small building so if, I know all my neighbours.

Sometimes the responses to the open statements were not sufficient enough to generate common ground on their own. This was because the responses tended to be quite specific to the unique experiences of one respondent. Thus, subsequent steps typically involved a querying process in which the moderator and respondent sought to establish a common ground between them. The results indicated that in most instances, this clarification of the common ground broadened the dialogue topic, so that other participants could be included in the dialogue. For instance, this querying process is apparent in the longer excerpt of the previous example:

M: Okay, so the first question is what does good housing do for me? What do people think?

P1: Well, I have a small we're in a small building so if, I know all my neighbours.

M: Okay so it helps with a sense of...

P1: Safety.

M: Safety, okay

P1: Yeah.

M: It also sounds like you might be thinking a little bit about company. You know all your neighbours. Is it an opportunity to socialize, or...?

P1: Yeah, that too.

M: Yeah.

Contributing statements in dialogue. In response to the second research question, *what contributions aid in the development of common ground?*, the results from the qualitative analysis suggest that there are multiple contributing statements such as: 1) single statements; 2) statements that refer to or build onto what another participant said; 3) querying statements; 4) clarifying statements; 5) agreeing or disagreeing statements; 6) facilitating statements (see Table 1). As well, the findings also imply that these contributions play a role in expanding the common ground. Each of these contributing statements will be described below in turn.

Insert Table 1 about here

Single statements. Single statements are statements that include a single thought or one main idea. These kinds of contributions are not very developed or elaborate in detail. They are more general or vague and they often require a follow-up response, like querying or clarifying. The results of this study showed that single statements often occurred at the outset of the dialogue or when there was a change in the topic of conversation. Single statements also occurred when the common ground was initially being developed. In essence, these single statements can be thought of as conversation starters. For example, one dialogue began with:

M: How do we benefit from good housing, what does good housing do for us?

P2: It promotes well-being, and it's a community.

This statement provides several options for others to respond or contribute to the dialogue. For instance, the moderator could follow up this comment with a question or other participants can agree with this statement or make a statement that builds on the ideas of well-being or community. On the whole, the findings indicated that, in general, participants tended to make these statements more than the moderators.

Querying statements. Querying statements are questions that are posed to a single group member. The findings of this study demonstrated that these querying statements were used as a way to gain a clearer understanding, clarification or to gather more information. As well, among the group members, the moderators tended to use querying statements the most. Participants also used querying statements; however, this generally happened when a participant was accidentally taking on the moderator's role as an inquirer. Below is an example of querying statements from a moderator to a participant:

P2: It provides, ummm resources to allow you eventually to become independent.

M: Okay, so how do you mean, what do you mean resources ?

P2: Like resources and ummm, that help you out with ummm say cost of schooling or ummm ah ummm gives you ummm information on like the food banks, it gives you information on where ah you can get ah furniture and stuff like that for reasonable costs.

M: Okay, how does that happen? Is it just through the support or is it through talking with other people living in the same area?

P2: Ah well, where we live there's a program office where we can see the counsellors.

M: Okay.

Clarifying statements. *Clarifying* statements helped to clarify what was said or to make sure if what was said was correctly understood. These statements can be a repetition of the same words or a paraphrased version of what was said. Sometimes these clarifying statements can be thought of as a brief summary statement. Like the querying statements, the qualitative analysis identified that clarifying statements in the dialogues were generally made by the moderator, although some participants also made these kinds of statements. In this excerpt from a dialogue, a moderator makes a clarifying statement in response to a participant:

P1: Well, we have a tenant, two reps on the board as well but I never understood why. It's never been explained to me the role of the staff member at a tenants meeting when that's suppose to be a time and place to where tenants can bring their concerns forwards.

M: So you.. your not necessarily against it, you're just saying that that the reasons for it...

Referring to or building on statements. *Referring to or building on* statements are contributions that were related to developing common ground. These kinds of statements make reference to ideas, thoughts, feelings or experiences that were previously presented (and are now part of the common ground). This is what Hyden and Bulow (2003) talked about as a way to contribute to the common ground. The analysis suggested that participants primarily made these kinds of statements. For example, in one of the dialogues, a participant talked about safety issues in his housing and several participants referred back to his comment and added in other idea of safety to the common ground:

P3: Can you say, sort of related to, to the safety issue, ah, it keeps us well, in a mentally and physically. It's a health issue.

P(unknown): Like stability.

M: Stability, okay.

P8: It should promote contact with other people and also in terms of that safety thing, ah discourage contact where people want that. I think some people want contact and some people don't. And it should be able to respond to that. I think that all...also lets people be a, a, participate in their community at large. It's not just of the four walls but it's ah, a relationship with the world outside. If you have good housing I think you can participate as a citizen.

Agreeing and disagreeing statements. Statements that agree or disagree with other contributing statements are also important for the development of common ground. In this study, “agreement” was defined using Hyden and Bulow’s definition of *contributions to common ground*, which included “aligning oneself with other speakers” (2003, p. 311). These kinds of statements are also referred to as “back-channel signals” (Hyden, and Bulow, 2003). The analysis of the dialogues illustrated that participants often agreed with statements made by other participants and the moderator by saying: “yup”, “umm hum” and “yes”. By agreeing with others in the group, participants would not only illustrate that they understood what was said, but they would also align themselves with others. On the other hand, disagreeing statements were defined as a differing opinion, idea, or experience or being opposed to what someone else said. According to Myers (1998), disagreements can be classified by “dispreferred turns, hedges, concessions and attributions” (p. 99). As well, Myers (1998) noted that “any delay or modification in dyadic conversation is routinely taken as disagreement” (p.99). In contrast to the agreeing statements, there were no clear instances of disagreeing statements made between the participants or between a moderator and a participant in any of the dialogues.

Facilitating statements. *Facilitating* statements are statements that direct the flow of the dialogue and include *acknowledging*, *prompting*, and *directing* kinds of statements. The qualitative analysis found that all of these facilitating statements were generally made by the moderator, although some participants occasionally used facilitating statements. *Acknowledging statements* were used to acknowledge or recognize a participants’ contribution. They also served

to encourage participants to share their thoughts or comments with the group. For instance, both moderators made several comments such as: “okay”, “right”, “thanks” and “that was a good point”. *Prompting statements*, similar to acknowledging statements, were used to persuade or prompt participants to join in the discussion. The results found that both moderators frequently prompted individuals to join in the conversation by saying “anything else?”, “any other thoughts?” or “anybody else?” Finally, *directing statements* were primarily made by a moderator to a specific participant, in order to guide or direct the dialogue. For instance, during one of the dialogues, a moderator called on a participant by name to participate:

M: “Ummm, Peter², before the meeting you mentioned income.

P6: Of course.

M: Tell me a little bit about that.”

Differences among moderators. When compared across dialogues, both moderators made similar kinds of statements including open questions, clarifying, querying and facilitating statements. The analysis of the dialogues appears to indicate that there were no differences between the moderators in these dialogues. As well, since one of dialogues was from the mid-way point in the focus group meetings, and that each of the dialogue topics were uniquely different, time and topic were not factors that affected the way the moderators conducted the dialogues. To put in another way, findings showed that the moderators were consistent in their responding, in their style and in their guidance of the dialogues.

Interactions among group members

This section answers the third research question: *How do group members interact in a multi-stakeholder dialogue?* The findings from this study propose that the participants and moderators interact through dyadic or complex conversation structures. A *dyadic conversation*

² Name was changed for confidentiality

structure is defined as a conversation or an exchange of words or statements between two individuals. These two individuals can both be participants or one can be a participant and one can be a moderator. Conversely, a *complex conversation structure* is a conversation, an exchange or words or statements made between numerous individuals. This type of structure can occur solely between participants, or it can include a mix of participants and a moderator.

According to the qualitative analyses, some conversation structures happened more often when certain statements were made. For instance, dyadic conversation structures between a moderator and a participant tended to occur when open statements were made. This was noticed especially at the beginning of the dialogue or at the start of a new topic. Likewise, dyadic structures between a moderator and a participant happened more when querying, rephrasing, facilitating and single statements were made. As noted previously, the moderators tended to make these kinds of statements more than the participants. However, when participants used querying, rephrasing or facilitating statements, the conversation structures tended to be more complex and included other participants. In terms of dyadic conversational structures throughout the dialogues, there were more instances of dyadic structures between a moderator and a participant than between participants.

The analyses also showed that more complex conversation structures tended to occur when agreeing statements and statements that refer to another or which build on the common ground were made. As noted previously, participants mainly made these kinds of statements during the dialogue. The excerpt below demonstrates this complex structure between several participants and a moderator:

P4: Also, any complaints. I nor you normally find out what's going on with other people when everyone's... in passing. They'll say "Oh can you believe this".

M: So, it's kind of _____ (intelligible)

P4: Word of mouth, yeah.

P1: Grape vine.

P's: [Many participants speaking in agreement]

P2: That's what it comes down to.

Also, the results indicated that complex structures emerged when the moderators started to use these kinds of statements. For instance, when a moderator agreed with a comment from a participant, there appeared to be more participation from other group members:

P2: I think sort of accountability too. (M: Okay) That maintenance is over stretched. (M: Okay) Someone comes and says my toilet's broken we want to at least, you want to know when it's going to be fixed not just [unintelligible] right out and you never hear from them again (M: Yeah). There's gotta be some accountability for it....

M: Absolutely, yeah, absolutely is....

P4: I think accountability in general.

P(unknown): Yeah.

P2: Yeah, because sometimes it's just misuse of one of the tenants, misusing the, the whatever was broken all the time.

Overall, these complex conversation structures were not as common in the dialogues as the dyadic structures were.

Collaborative achievement of common ground.

Overall, the findings from the analysis revealed that common ground was often achieved among the multiple stakeholders. It appears that the various kinds of contributions or statements made by the moderators and participants assisted in the co-creation of common ground. For example, in one of the dialogues, the idea of safety was brought up by a participant. Other participants seemed to be able to relate to this idea of feeling safe, and they and proceeded to make other contributions to the common ground such as referring to what was previously said and building ideas about safety. The excerpt below illustrates this example of developing common ground:

P3: Ummm, Dr. Jones³ has said that 'Our first primeval need even as babies and children and youth is to feel safe.' And that's what housing should do, like, in my estimation. That is an immediate need that needs to be met.

M: Feel safe

³ Name changed for confidentiality

.....

P4: Can you say, sort of related to, to the safety issue, ah, it keeps us well, in a mentally and physically. It's a health issue.

P7: Provide Like stability.

F: Stability, okay.

P8: It should promote contact with other people and also in terms of that safety thing, ah discourage contact where people want that. I think some people want contact and some people don't. And it should be able to respond to that.... I think that all.... also lets people be a, a, participate in their community at large. It's not just of the four walls but it's ah, a relationship with the world outside. If you have good housing I think you can participate as a citizen.

F: Okay...These are sort of...the things that maybe also does for friends and family, right.[P:yeah} A penny for your thoughts?

P6: I got one.

F: Yeah

P6: Taking part in, ahhh, neighborhood watch.... You want your security not only inside but outside the, the whole community.

F: Right, so this is kind of safe from the community, right

P6: Yeah.

P7: I'd say for friends and family, it can help them maybe develop a relationship cause they're not concerned about the, the safety. They're able to maybe, instead of working on issues, work on a good relationship.

The idea of safety, or feeling safe as being a basic human need blossoms into a common understanding of what the word "safety" means to the group. This includes ideas such as: feeling mentally and physically safe and well; feeling safe within ones housing; feeling safe within ones community; family and friends having peace of mind concerning their loved ones safety; and being able to develop relationships with other because the environment is safe.

Within all of the dialogues, there were similar instances when common ground surrounding a particular topic was achieved. However, sometimes common ground was more challenging to develop and it did not occur consistently throughout the dialogues. At this point, it is difficult to determine what factors or contributions hindered the development of dialogue. As mentioned previously, single statements that are too personal or those that other group members cannot relate to may be a factor.

Discussion

On the whole, this study introduces some novel findings concerning the process of dialogue, the multiple factors involved in dialogue, the roles of the participants and moderators and the achievement of common ground within a participatory evaluation. In this section, these results will be examined in greater detail, with references to the literature and implications for further research.

The Process of Dialogue

The model developed in this study illustrates how a dialogue flows from an introductory statement, to various contributions made by the group members, to who talks to whom, and to the achievement of common ground. Perhaps most importantly, this model demonstrates that this sequence re-occurs throughout the course of a dialogue, thus creating an iterative pattern. This model is novel because it focuses on the characteristics that affect the process or development of dialogue, rather than on the sociological factors that influence dialogue (Lehoux et al, 2006). As well, this model demonstrates how dialogue develops within a multiple stakeholder group. This model can be applied to other multiple stakeholder groups, especially within a participatory evaluation context. It may be useful for dialogues involving and encouraging devalued, at risk or vulnerable participants to voice their concerns, opinions, feelings and experiences, since the tenant participants in this study had similar backgrounds. Also, this model may provide a practical tool or method for analysing processes and interactions between group members in large focus groups with eight to ten individuals or more. It may also be extrapolated into the conversation analysis field as a means to further explore turn-taking, pauses and semantics. Finally, this model is useful for dialogue facilitators, for it provides an outline of the processes and characteristics involved in dialogue, or use it to modify his or her contribution patterns.

Structures of Conversations.

The results also showed that dyadic conversation structures tended to occur more often than complex structures. As well, it appears that there were more dyadic structures between a moderator and a participant than between participants. These findings may be attributable to two factors. First, it may be easier to establish common ground between two individuals rather than including ideas, thoughts and experience from three, six or ten individuals. With a larger group size, participants may feel more inhibited, or be less likely to participate. Thus, the dyadic conversations may have come about because it is easier to talk to one person, like the moderator, directly. As Branigan (2006) noted: “the more addresses involved in a dialogue, the more potentially complex an iterative process of presentation and acceptance” is (p. 171). Although having two individuals start the common ground may be viewed as being simpler, it may also allow other participants the freedom to jump in and share their opinions or agree with the statements being made.

Contributions or Statements Made By Participants.

As well, the findings also pointed out that participants frequently agreed with statements and rarely disagreed with one another or with the moderator. There are several reasons for these findings. First, participants may have agreed more readily because it might have been an easier way to participate in the dialogues. For instance, by agreeing, participants would not have to share personal examples, or share a large amount in order to participate in a dialogue. Second, participants may have agreed because of the hierarchies or barriers between tenants, staff members and the moderators. Even though these groups of stakeholders were brought together for the purpose of collaborating equally, and they were randomized into the discussion groups, there still may have been status barriers which prohibited more open communication. For example, in a separate wrap up session, staff members stated that they sometimes felt uncomfortable speaking up during the dialogues, for fear of appearing judgemental or

authoritative, especially towards their own tenants. Therefore, staff members may not have said everything they wanted to in the dialogues, particularly if they disagreed with their tenants' comments. Although the tenants did not note any tension within the dialogues, it is possible that some tenants may have agreed in order to appear amicable, or to be perceived as being good study participants.

Finally, there may have been little disagreement in the dialogues because of the aim of the evaluation project. The main goal was to gain an understanding about supportive housing practices through these dialogues. In other words, the inquisitive nature of these dialogues was more like Perskill and Torres' (1999) Collective Inquiry approach to evaluation or like Greene's (2001) Relational approach both of which emphasize sharing, respectful communication and a deeper understanding of the issues at hand, rather than achieving consensus, like House and Howe's (2000) Deliberative Democratic Dialogue approach.

Conversation Structures, Contributions and Roles of Group Members.

The findings suggested that the moderators and participants primarily made specific kinds of statements. In general, the moderators made more querying, rephrasing and facilitating statements, whereas participants made more agreeing, referring to and building on the common ground types of statements. However, the results also indicated that more complex conversation patterns were apparent when moderators began using the statements that participants were using. For example, when moderators made more agreeing or referring to kinds of statements, there tended to be more complex interactions between group members. Alternatively, when participants made more querying, rephrasing or facilitating statements, there appeared to be more complex conversation structures. These findings agree with other research which found that "multi-party dialogues may involve participants adopting roles other than those of speaker and addressee" (Branigan, 2006, p. 174). However, the results from this study suggest that the

participants and the moderators assumed these different roles unconsciously, or to put it another way, without a particular intent. Perhaps if participants and moderators purposefully adopted each others' roles, or to participate more as equals, more complex structures between group members would emerge.

Size & Characteristics of the Group

The size of the focus groups and the differing characteristics of the participants may have also influenced the process of dialogues. As noted in the literature review, the larger the size of the group, there is a greater risk that common ground would not be established. However, the results from this study imply that, at least in some cases, a common ground was created.

Although common ground was found in the dialogues, the possibility remains that the size of the focus groups, with ten or more participants, did hinder the development of common ground.

Likewise, the backgrounds of the participants and the potential barriers because of status could have also influenced the presence or absence of common ground. If the focus groups were more homogenous or smaller in size, then common ground might have been more prevalent in the dialogues. As well, a smaller sample size or cohesive group might have also affected the number of complex structures versus dyadic structures. More research in this area is needed.

Differences Between The Moderators

On the whole, there were few differences in the types of statements made by both moderators, and there were no variations in the overall patterns of conversation structures and the development of common ground. A small difference between the moderators was the preference to use certain kinds of statements more than others. This could be related to personal styles, gender differences or the preference to employ certain facilitating tactics when moderating a dialogue. These differences may have an effect on how common ground is developed and they may affect the overall group dynamics. More research on the variations

between moderators' styles is needed and how these styles influence or hinder the kinds of statements made by participants, the types of conversation structures that emerge, and the development of common ground within dialogues.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. First, three focus group dialogues is a small sample size. Second, although the staff members and tenants were combined in an effort to encourage collaboration and dialogue, it may have been better to conduct separate dialogues. After the focus group sessions, it was found that some staff members were uncomfortable participating, and this could have affected the dialogues. Similarly, it is possible that tenants also felt uncomfortable, and they may not have participated fully in the dialogues. As well, tenants may have responded or made certain contributions because they wanted to be perceived as good study participants. Thus, the status barriers between group members may have affected the dialogues more than once originally thought.

Implications & Future Research

Overall, this study produced several interesting implications. First and foremost, this study created a model that captured the process of a dialogue with multiple stakeholders. As well, this model demonstrated multiple factors or components that occur within a dialogue. This model not only fills a gap in the existing literature, but it also provides an area of future research. For this study in particular, it would be interesting to test this model with all of the focus group dialogues from this study, as well as dialogues from subsequent years of the HPCC project. Future research should also focus on verifying the proposed model of the process and factors involved in dialogue with different samples that include both large and small group sizes and heterogeneous and homogenous samples. As well future studies could also focus on different dialogue topics, moderators and timelines. Finally, this study also has implications for

researchers, focus group moderators and other practitioners in the field. The model and the findings can affect the way a researcher or moderator conducts the focus group and generates a dialogue. For instance, a moderator might try to make an open statement that is general, yet specific to the group and the topic at hand. Also, a moderator could encourage individuals to take on more facilitating statements, thereby decreasing the formal role of the moderator and making the dialogue more open. Overall, the results from this study may ultimately influence and change the way practitioners participate in dialogues.

Conclusion

One can easily see that a dialogue is more than mere words exchanged between individuals. Although it can be simple in structure, it is often complex, especially within a large group setting. Also, dialogue is something that is co-created at a particular moment in time. Each dialogue will be different from the next, but there is a thread that ties them together- the common ground. The common ground helps to connect people within the conversation. It allows them to relate to the topic at hand, and gives them an opportunity to share their own related thoughts and experiences. However, establishing this common ground can be difficult and it depends on the moderator, as well as the participants. As these case studies suggest, the common ground can be developed from the topic and further expanded through the experiences of the group members with guidance, inquiry and clarification.

Previously, other researchers have examined dialogue mainly in terms of its goals, such as reaching consensus; following the rules of an argument (House & Howe, 2000); gathering information or inquiring (Preskill & Torres, 1999); and understanding (Greene, 2001). Although these are important goals for dialogue, none of these authors studied the characteristics of a dialogue that has reached its goal. Our results have allowed us to isolate and identify the characteristics of a multi-stakeholder dialogue.

The model of dialogue identified in these case studies shows the complexity of dialogue, the need for a common ground, the role of individual group members and the multifaceted role of the moderator. Metaphorically, we can describe the components and processes of dialogue in another way. In many respects, dialogue is like the “head motif” in jazz. The lead musician plays a melodic line. Then one by one, other musicians join in, adding harmonies, counter melodies and variations of the original melodic line. Sometimes musicians will have solos or duets, or they will all play in unison. At other times, there will be silences, which are also a part of the music. This entire improvisation is co-created in one perfect moment, with a mixture of musicians and instruments. It is difficult, and quite possibly next to impossible, to recreate the same piece. This motif also plays out similarly in dialogue. The moderator is like the lead musician, setting the key signature and tempo of the music and guiding the other musicians. The melodic line that occurs again and again in some form or another within the piece is like the common ground that surfaces and re-surfaces within a dialogue. It is the foundation that holds the music, and the dialogue, together. Without it, there would only be a cacophony of sounds. Without this fundamental knowledge of dialogues, there would be disjointed phrases, a cacophony or empty silences, rather than a beautiful, harmonious melody.

References

- Alvesson, M., Skoldberg, K. (2000). *Reflexive Methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Anderson, H. (1997). *Conversation, Language and Possibilities: A postmodern approach to therapy*. New York, NY : Basic Books.
- Brangian, H. (2006). Perspectives on Multi-party Dialogue. *Research on Language and Computation, 4*, 153-177.
- Branigan, H., Pickering, M., McLean, J., & Cleland, A. (2007). Syntactic alignment and participant role in dialogue. *Cognition, 104*, 163-197.
- Duggleby, W. (2005). What about focus group interaction data?. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*, 832-840.
- Fay, N., Garrod, S., & Carletta, J. (2000). Group discussion as interactive dialogue or as serial monologue: The influence of group size. *Psychological Science, 11*, 481-486.
- Flick, U. (2002). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Greene, J. (2001). Dialogue in Evaluation: A relational perspective. *Evaluation, 7*, 181-187.
- Gronkaer, M., Curtis, T., de Crespigny, C., & Delmar, C. (2011). Analysing group interaction in focus group research: Impact on content and the role of the moderator. *Qualitative Studies, 2*, 16-30.
- House, E., Howe, K. (2000). Deliberative democratic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation, 85*, 3-12.
- Hollander, J. (2004). The social contexts of focus groups. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 33*, 602-637.
- Hyden, L., & Bulow, P. (2003). Who's talking: Drawing conclusions from focus groups- some methodological considerations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 6*, 305-321.
- Karlsson, O. (2001). Critical Dialogue: Its value and meaning. *Evaluation, 7*, 211-227.
- Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health and Illness, 1*, 103-121.
- Lehoux, P., Poland, B., & Daudelin, G. (2006). Focus group research and "the patient's view". *Social Science & Medicine, 63*, 2091-2104.

- Moen, J., Antonov, K., Lars, J., Nilsson, G., & Ring, L. (2010). Interaction between participants in focus groups with older patients and general practitioners. *Qualitative Health Research, 20*, 607-616.
- Myers, G. (1998). Displaying opinions: Topics and disagreements in focus groups. *Language in Society, 27*, 85-111.
- O'Connell, D., Kowal, S., & Kaltenbacher, E. (1990). Turn-Taking: A critical analysis of the research tradition. *Journal of Psycholinguistics Research, 19*, 345-373.
- Parkinson, S., Nelson, G., & Horgan, S. (1999). From housing to homes: A review of the literature on housing approaches for psychiatric consumer/survivors. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 18*, 145-164.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Newbury Park, London: Sage Publications.
- Perskill, H., Torres, R. (1999). *Evaluative inquiry for learning in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Ryan, K., & DeStefano, L. (2000). Disentangling Dialogue: Issues from practice. *New Directions for Evaluation, 85*, 63-76.
- Schegloff, E. (2000). Overlapping talk and the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language in Society, 29*, 1-63.
- Seikkuta, J., & Arnkil, T. (2006). *Dialogical Meetings in Social Networks*. London: Karnac Books.
- Sylvestre, J., Cousins, B., Sundar, P., Aubry, T., Hinsberger, V. (2008). Engaging Stakeholders in the planning of a collaborative multi-agency evaluation: The HousingPlus collaborative communities project. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 34*, 212-217.
- Vicsek, L. (2007). A scheme for analyzing the results of focus groups. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 6*, 20-34.
- Widdershoven, G. (2001). Dialogue in Evaluation: A Hermeneutic perspective. *Evaluation, 7*, 253-263.
- Williams, J., & Ayres, L. (2007). 'I'm like you': Establishing and protecting a common ground in focus groups with Huntington disease caregivers. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 12*, 655-664.

Appendix A

Table 1.

Description of Factors within a Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue

Characteristics	Definition	Who makes these Statements
Open Statements	A question posited to all group members and it is usually general enough to allow for a response from anyone in the group. The key is that it is question is made to the entire group. .g., “Okay, so the first question is what does good housing do for me? What do people think?”	Moderators mainly made these statements.
Common Ground	The common ground is comprised of important or integral ideas that the participants and moderator develop together. This is the common knowledge that all of the group members have and can refer to at any point throughout the dialogue.	Both the moderator and participants generate the common ground together.
Single Statements	A single statement is comprised of a single idea that is related to the discussion topic. It can be one word, one sentence or a few sentences. A single statement is one that is not connected to any other statement. A single statement can be thought of as a conversation starter. E.g., M: “What does good housing do for you”? P1: “[it] promotes independence”.	Participants generally make these kinds of statements.

Characteristics	Definition	Who makes these Statements
Querying Statements	<p>A Querying statement is a question posed after a response has been made. It can be used to gain a clearer understanding, clarification or more information about what was said. It can be thought of as a way to inquire about something.</p> <p>E.g., P2: “It provides, ummm resources to allow you eventually to become independent.</p> <p>M: Okay, so how do you mean, what do you mean resources?”.</p>	<p>Moderators in general made the majority of these kinds of statements, although other participants occasionally made these statements.</p>
Clarifying Statements	<p>A rephrasing statement is a repetition of the same words or a paraphrased version of what was said. These kinds of statements help to clarify what was said or make sure if what was said was correctly understood.</p> <p>E.g., P1: “...The inspections also help them get an idea of who might need, ummm, assistance with home management. ‘Cause we have had some partner agencies.</p> <p>M: Okay...so assistance with home management?”</p>	<p>Moderators in general made the majority of these kinds of statements, although other participants occasionally made these statements.</p>
Referring to or Building on Statements	<p>Referring to or building on statements are statements that contribute to the already established common ground. These kinds of statements make</p>	<p>Participants mainly make these kinds of statements.</p>

Characteristics	Definition	Who makes these Statements
	<p>reference to ideas, thoughts, feelings or experiences previously presented.</p> <p>E.g., P1: So back to what Martha was saying earlier</p>	
Facilitating Statements:	<p>Facilitating statements are statements that direct the flow of the dialogue and include acknowledging, prompting, and directing kinds of statements.</p>	<p>In general, moderators mainly made facilitating kinds of statements, although some participants occasionally made these kinds of statements.</p>
Acknowledging Statements	<p>Acknowledging statements were used to acknowledge or recognize a participants' contribution. They also served to encourage participants to share their thoughts or comments with the group.</p> <p>E.g., M: "okay", "right", "thanks" and "that was a good point".</p>	<p>Moderators mainly made these kinds of statements, although participants occasionally made these statements as well.</p>
Prompting Statements	<p>Words or sentences used to persuade or prompt participants to join in the discussion.</p> <p>E.g., M: "anything else?", "any other thoughts?" or "anybody else?".</p>	<p>Moderators mainly made these kinds of statements, although participants occasionally made these statements as well.</p>
Directing Statements	<p>Directing statements are statements that guide or direct the turn taking in the dialogue.</p> <p>E.g., M: So, Brian, you were going to say something?</p>	<p>Moderators mainly made these kinds of statements, and these statements were often directed at other participants.</p>
Dyadic Conversation Structures	<p>This is basically a conversation or an exchange of words or statements between two individuals.</p>	<p>This structure can occur between two participants or a participant and a moderator.</p>

Characteristics	Definition	Who makes these Statements
	E.g., Moderator-Participant-Moderator or Participant 1- Participant 2- Participant 1.	
Complex Conversation Structures	This is a conversation, an exchange or words or statements made between numerous individuals. E.g. Moderator-Participant 1- Participant 2 or Participant 1- Participant 2- Participant 3.	This type of structure can occur solely between participants, or it can include a mix of participants and a moderator.

Appendix B

Figure 1. A model mapping the process of a multiple stakeholder dialogue

