

DIALOGUE, DISCUSSION AND BRAINSTORMING IN SYNDICATES

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AIM

- To Reinforce the Need for a Dialogic Practice in Professional Military Education
- To Explore the Differences between Dialogue and Discussion
- To Apply Dialogue and Discussion as Essential Communication tools for productive Syndicate Brainstorming Sessions

SCOPE

- Introduction
- Critical Perspective and Educational Practice
- Education as an Ontologically Dialogic Process
- Dialogue as an Inter-thinking Process
- Discussion as a Procedural Dissensus
- Brainstorming in a Syndicate Session
- Break
- Exercise – Mock Syndicate Session
- Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

- The VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) nature of the defence and security environment have heightened the need for a systematic education and training for the country's defenders.

INTRODUCTION

Systematic Education Conditions Participants
to Process Knowledge and Issues/Problems
Beyond the **Non-system** to the Holistic
System Approach

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INTRODUCTION⁶

Non-system thinking views issues from single viewpoints/perspectives, or when multiple viewpoints are used, they are individual non-standardized viewpoints in random order.

Systems thinking considers **relationships** (rather than unrelated objects), **connectedness**, **process** (rather than structure), **the whole** (rather than its parts), **the patterns** (rather than the contents) of a system and context.

INTRODUCTION

- Social Systems are made of **objective complexities** (not subjective complexities or complications) with **complex interrelationships** that lead to **the emergence of unpredictable outcomes**, which require the determination of **the root cause or causes** of any issue or problem.

INTRODUCTION

- The challenge of planning and management of operations in a complex security environment demand the skills of critical and creative thinking, inter-thinking and collaborative problem-solving abilities
- Professional military educational engagements, as a matter of necessity, should always be positioned towards the development of these critical skills in the participants through activities based on dialogue, discussion and brainstorming.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

- Critical perspective presents education as a practice of **freedom** and **equality** within an **inter-subjective** communicative interaction.

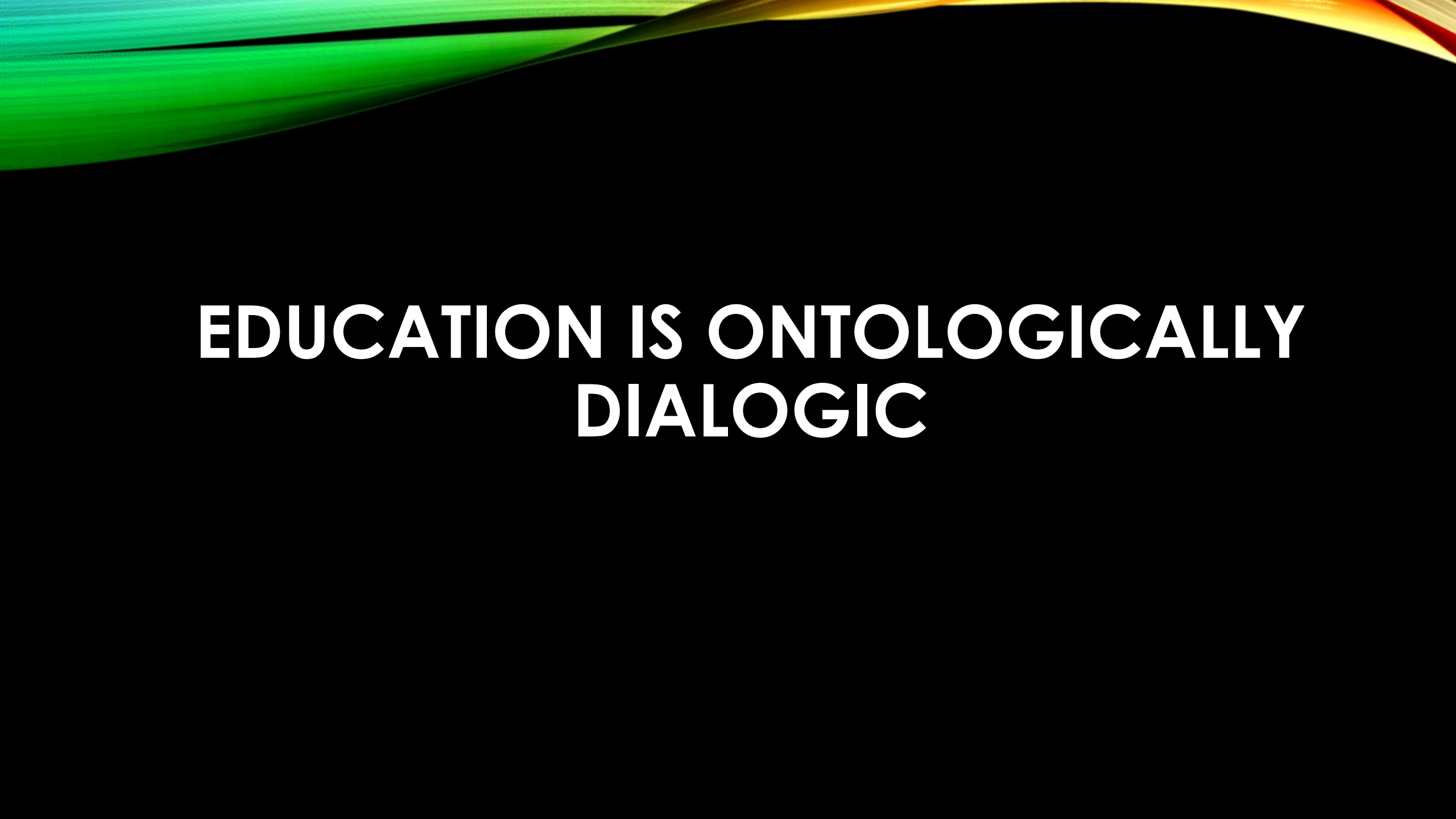
WHICH IMPLIES ...

- the curriculum no longer guides by intentionally leading towards a closure. It guides through the **presentation of alternatives, in the form of interrogations** which complicates the scene, unsettles the doings and understandings of others and demands the exercise of critical choice, in other words, **it guides by intentionally opening closures** (Osberg, 2008, p. 158)

HENCE:

- educational space is a space of **complex responsiveness, and not mechanical responsiveness**, which involves

“the opening of possibilities by the teacher in response to the student (which itself entails a choice from multiple possibilities), and the making of choices by the student in response to the possibilities opened by the teacher, and then again by the teacher in response to the choices of the student” (Osberg, 2008, p. 157).



**EDUCATION IS ONTOLOGICALLY
DIALOGIC**

EDUCATION IS ONTOLOGICALLY DIALOGIC

- whatever teachers and students do (or not do) whether in their classrooms or beyond it, they are locked in dialogic relations. (**Matusov, 2009**)
- a “combined vision of the aims of education with an understanding of the processes of teaching and learning” which therefore proposes that “education should aim, amongst other things, at dialogue as an end in itself” (**Wegerif et al., 2019**).

HOWEVER . . .

- this includes not only dialogues with specific others (e.g. teachers) but also, dialogues with cultural others (personified communities) and dialogue with 'the Infinite Other', the unbounded horizon that goes beyond and questions every fixed position conceptualised as an outside voice that can prompt thinking (Wegerif et. al, 2019, p. 81).

EDUCATION AS A DIALOGIC PRACTICE

- meaning-making is always **creative**; it is a **surprise**.
- meaning-making process occurs **between at least two distinct consciousnesses** that are oblique and non-transparent to each other.
- meaning making is mediated by **questions from both parties** in the dialogue

LEARNING AS A DIALOGIC PROCESS

- Since learning is the **transformation of a student's meaning**, it is unpredictable, undetermined, and cannot be designed or controlled by the teacher (**Wenger, 1998**).
- Learning is **always discursive**, that is, the process and product of a new meaning always exists among diverse, real or virtual, consciousnesses.
- Learning is always mediated by the students' questions (explicit or tacit).



DIALOGUE, DISCUSSION AND BRAINSTORMING

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIALOGUE?

- Communication in learning is not a one-way linear process but a reciprocal one in which ideas are bounced back and forth and on that basis take participant's thinking forward' (Alexander 2004: 48).
- Therefore "to stay alive, meaning has to renew itself continually. Meaning cannot be repeated, because even literal repetition itself transforms the meaning" (Matusov, 2009).



HENCE . . .

- In dialogue, **ideas are bounced back and forth**, participants are equal partners striving to reach an agreed outcome and trying out and developing the **joint construction of knowledge** or becoming involved in a process of **'inter thinking'** (**Mercer 2000**)

INTER-THINKING AS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF LEARNING THROUGH DIALOGUE

- Having to say what you mean – **thinking aloud** – is a way of making your thoughts clear to yourself: having to explain and describe things to a partner is a way of developing a shared understanding of ideas.
- If your partner is prepared to accept your initial suggestion, without you having to justify or defend it, you have no stimulus to engage critically with your own thoughts. Also, you have no alternative suggestions to produce **the creative friction from which new ideas arise**.
- **This inter-thinking** – *the joint engagement with one another's ideas to think aloud together, solve problems or make mutual meaning* – is an invaluable use of spoken language (Mercer 2000).

THEREFORE . . .

- In dialogue the **otherness and difference** among the participants is brought into play in a developmental process in which **dissensus leads to co-creation and regeneration/renewal of knowledge.**

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DISCUSSION?

- Discussion is a communication where different opposing views are presented and defended in a search for a best view in support of a decision that must be made (Senge, 2009)
- In group discussion, people want their own views to be accepted by the group thus the emphasis is on winning rather than on learning (Arnold, 2013), .

TYPES OF DISCUSSION

- There are different types of discussions that occur naturally and which can be recreated in educational engagements.
- These include discussions where the participants have to:
 - i. **Make decisions** (e.g. decide who to invite to your graduation and where to lodge them)
 - ii. **Give and/or share opinions on a given topic** (e.g. discussing beliefs about the effectiveness of zero-sum military operations)
 - iii. **Create something** (e.g. plan of operation and make a poster as a medium for feedback on an exercise)
 - iv. **Solve a problem** (e.g. discussing the situations behind a series of logical problems)

HOWEVER . . .

- In a dialogic educational space, discussions are led with **emphasis to winning as well as learning**, since it has been established that:
- “An ontological approach to education as dialogue assumes that all practices, discourses, and relationships are inherently dialogic because the meaning-making process is dialogic. **Life is ontologically dialogic**” (Matusov, 2009)

HENCE . . .

- even as discussion and dialogue have been identified as necessary counterparts in **a quest for consensus** (Flood, 1999), in a dialogic educational space, it is in this quest for consensus that the major difference exists between the two.
- The recognition of the discursive and indeterminate nature of learning and the novelty arising from otherness and difference among the participants, positions **dialogue as inherently a process-oriented to the generation of dissensus**; while **discussion**, by its quest to converge into a common decision about the right action to be take by the group, **is oriented to consensus through a procedural dissensus**.



THEREFORE . . .

- Both dialogue and discussion are important to a group capable of continual generative learning, but their power lies in their synergy

- A learning team masters movement back and forth between dialogue and discussion. The ground rules are different. The goals are different. Failing to distinguish them, teams usually have neither dialogue nor productive discussions. A unique relationship develops among team members who enter into dialogue regularly. They develop a deep trust that cannot help but carry over to discussions. They develop a richer understanding of the uniqueness of each person's point of view. . . . When it is appropriate to defend a point of view, they do it more gracefully and with less rigidity, that is without putting "winning" as a first priority (**Senge, 2009, p. 5**).

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY BRAINSTORMING?

- Brainstorming is **a group inter-thinking and creativity technique** by which efforts are made to find a conclusion for a specific problem by gathering a list of ideas spontaneously contributed by the members of the group.
- People are able to think more freely and they suggest as many spontaneous new ideas as possible. All the ideas are noted down without criticism and after the brainstorming session the ideas are evaluated (**Osborn, 1967**).

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- Brainstorming is one of the most effective techniques used for creative knowledge generation in syndicate rooms especially with the necessary follow-up evaluation of ideas.

BRAINSTORMING IN A SYNDICATE SESSION

- Brainstorming is most effective in group learning when there is a **single, specific problem to solve**, which requires creative thinking (Osborn 1967).
- Brainstorming processes could be conducted in **varied ways** and through **varied media** either through face- to – face brainstorming or Electronic Brainstorming (EBS).

PRINCIPLES FOR BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS

- **Deferred Judgment and Reach for Quantity**
- reduce social inhibitions among group members
- stimulate idea generation by either withholding criticism or motivating self-expression
- welcoming seemingly wild ideas
- combining thoughts to improve ideas
- increase over-all creativity of the group

GROUND RULES FOR BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS

- Ground rules for syndicate brainstorming sessions are to do with active listening, thoughtful speaking and respectful collaboration.
- Some useful ground rules include:

GROUND RULES FOR SYNDICATE BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS

- Group is to elect/appoint a leader and a scribe to write down ideas
- Everyone in the group is encouraged to contribute
- All relevant information is shared
- People give reasons for their ideas and opinions
- Contributions are treated with respect
- People can challenge one another's proposals (if they feel they have good reason); everyone is prepared to accept challenges
- Alternatives are discussed before a decision is taken
- All in the group are encouraged to speak by other group members
- The group seeks to reach an agreement, and takes joint responsibility for decisions

EVALUATION OF IDEAS

- After brainstorming, follows the **evaluation stage** when **ideas are then interrogated, duplicates are eliminated, and analysis are made of acceptable ideas** towards reaching the final decision for the group.
- For a high level of **dialogicality** to be achieved, the participants need the mastery of some sub-skills.

USEFUL SUB-SKILLS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- There are a number of different sub-skills which participants will need to be able to successfully and effectively participate in a syndicate session.
- Participants need to develop the ability to:
 - i. Analyse
 - li. Integrate
 - iii. Persuade
 - iv. Control Emotion
 - v. Support
 - vi. Use functional Language for such functions as Giving reasons, Agreeing and Disagreeing, Giving opinions et.c

EXERCISE

- **As useful as Brainstorming can be, it is not without problems. Work through the accompanied exercise to identify some of the problems with brainstorming so as to prepare yourself towards generating ideas for improving your syndicate brainstorming sessions.**

SYNDICATE MEETING: BRAINSTORMING AND EVALUATING IDEAS



IDENTIFY THE 4 RULES AND 6 CRITICISMS

- blocking
- illusion of group productivity
- combine and improve ideas
- personal contribution
- evaluation apprehension
- social matching effect
- focus on quantity
- welcome unusual ideas
- free rider problem
- withhold criticism

WORK THROUGH YOUR WORKSHEETS FOR:

2. The problem with brainstorming

3. Useful phrases for making suggestions

- Eg: 1. Very unusual ideas: This might sound crazy, but ...; Just thinking aloud for a moment, but ...; It probably wouldn't work in practice, but ...;

4. Make three suggestions about how to improve brainstorming based on the criticisms in the text.

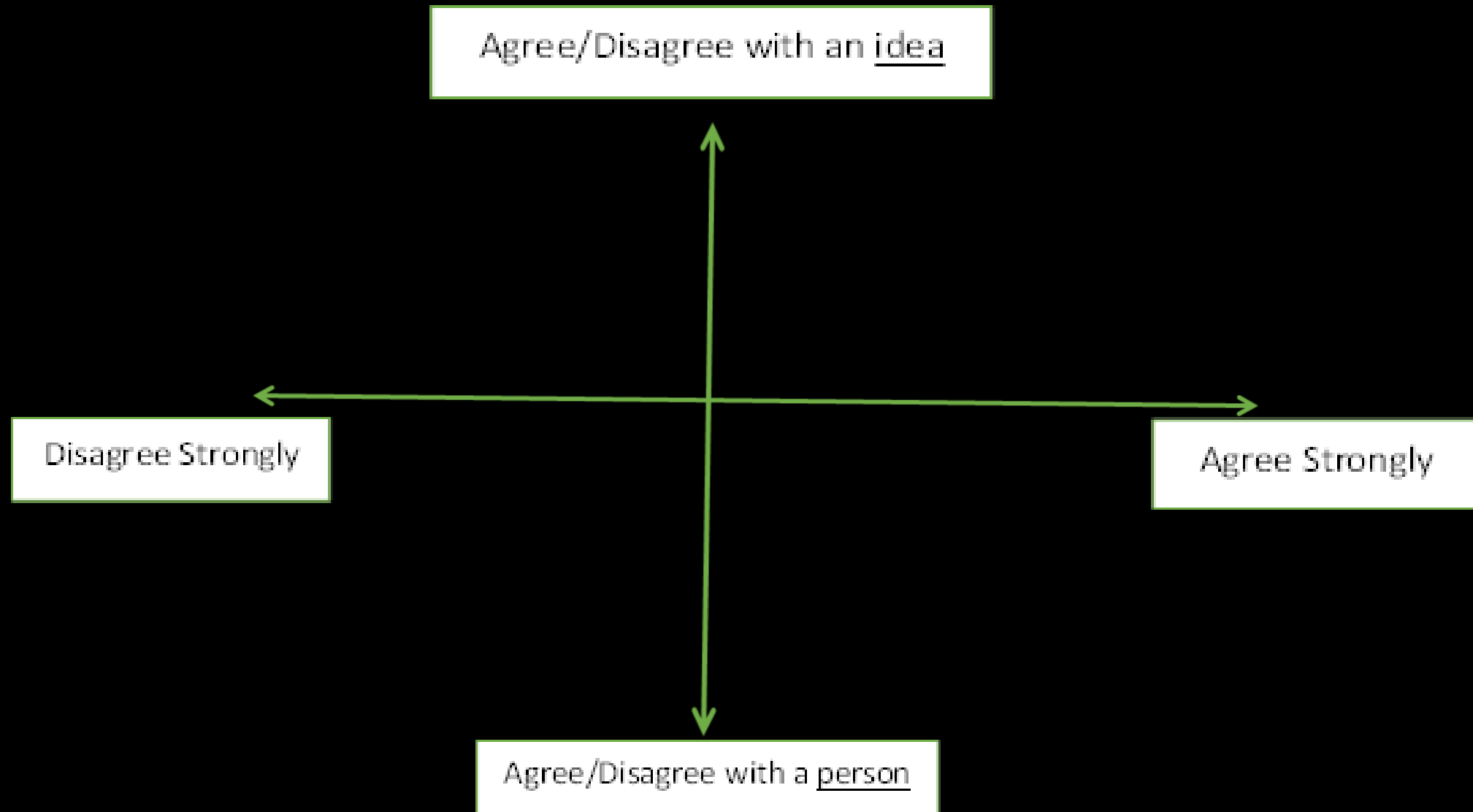
USEFUL PHRASES FOR EVALUATING IDEAS

- a. I don't think it would work.
- b. That's a brilliant idea.
- c. It might just work.
- d. Absolutely.
- e. Maybe. I'm not sure.
- f. No, I don't think so.
- g. I'm not keen at all.
- h. I'm not really convinced.
- i. I think it needs a lot more thought.

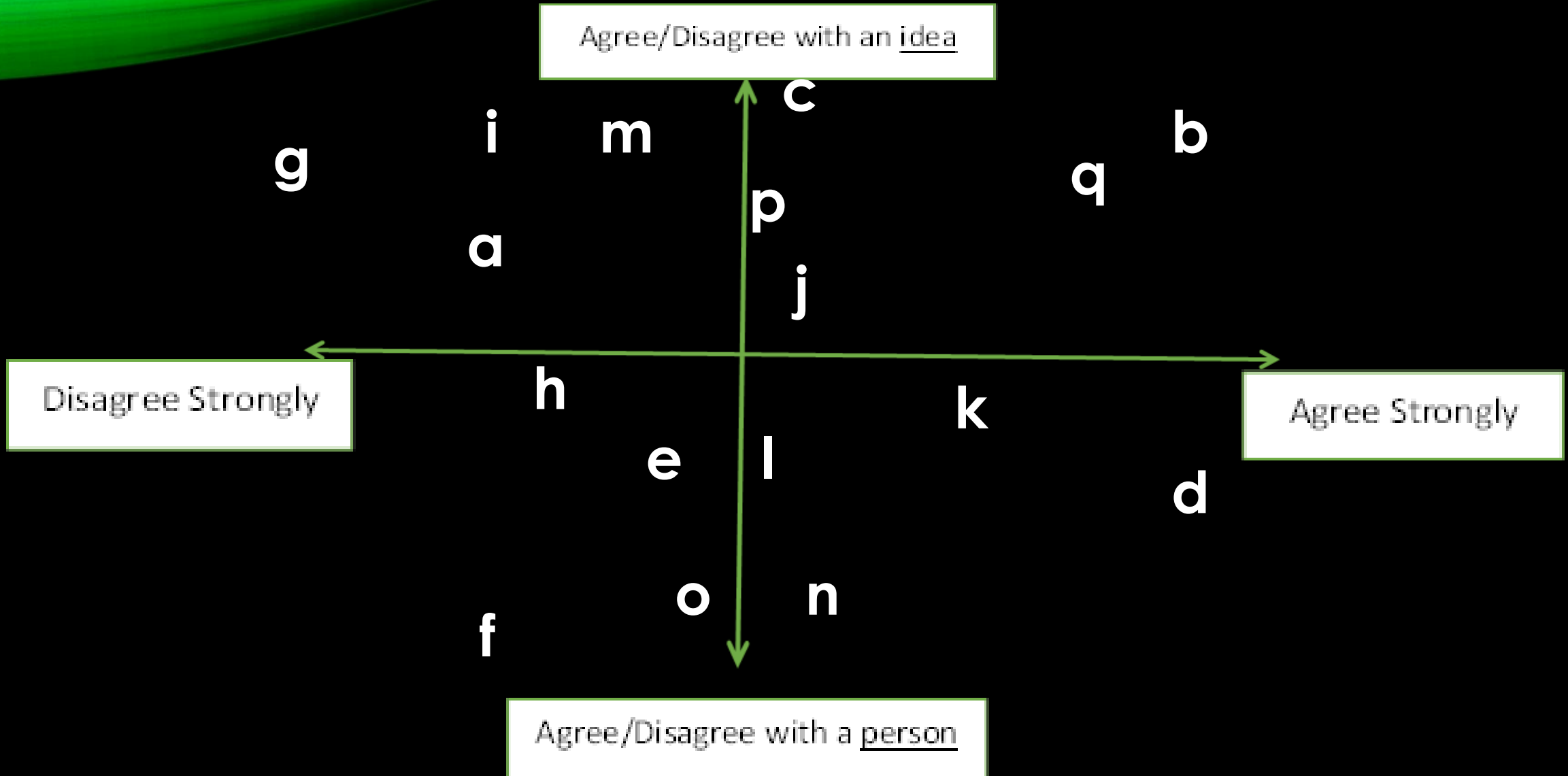
USEFUL PHRASES FOR EVALUATING IDEAS

- j That's not a bad idea.
- k. Yes, I think you're right.
- l. Are you sure?
- m. I'm really not happy about it.
- n. Well, I agree up to a point.
- o. Well, yes and no.
- p. This idea has potential, but it's not quite there yet.
- q. I think this is just what we need.

IN PAIRS COMPLETE THE EVALUATING IDEAS GRAPH



IN PAIRS COMPLETE THE EVALUATING IDEAS GRAPH



PRACTICE

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- Role-play a brainstorming session on the subject: **How to improve brainstorming sessions during your course.**
- You can use your sentences from 3 to get you started, but hopefully, you'll also get lots of new ideas during the meeting.

CONCLUSION

- The new world order has continued to intensify in complexities of the defence and security environment, with an attendant need for the managers and leaders of security and defence operations to develop the critical skills of critical and creative thinking, inter-thinking and collaborative problem-solving abilities.
- The mainstream professional military educational practice, as it is, might be inadequate in equipping the educatees of these vital skills.

CONCLUSION

- Hence there is the need for a dialogic educational practice which is hoped to apply extensively the communicative tools of dialogue, discussion and brainstorming in a dialogic educational space for an effective generation and regeneration of knowledge for tackling the numerous complex security and defence challenges that the world is currently faced with.

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THANK YOU

A group of hands holding up large red letters spelling 'THANK YOU' against a white background. The letters are thick and three-dimensional. The hands are of various skin tones and are positioned below the letters, holding them from underneath. The background is a solid white rectangle. Above the white rectangle is a decorative header with green and yellow wavy lines on a black background.