

UNDERSTANDING DIALOGUE, DISCUSSION AND BRAINSTORMING

for

Participants of Army War College Course 8

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AIM



- To Introduce the Need for a Change in the Perception and Practice of 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 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 21st century defence and security environment have heightened the need for a systematic education and training for the defenders of the country.

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)
- According to Arnold (2013), In group discussion, people want their own views to be accepted by the group thus the emphasis is on winning rather than on learning.

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 and make a poster as a medium for feedback on a language course)
 - iv. **Solve a problem*** (e.g. discussing the situations behind a series of logic 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 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 taken 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).



- **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 as a face- to –face brainstorming or as Electronic Brainstorming (**EBS**).

Principles for Brainstorming Sessions

- **Deferred Judgment and Reach for Quantity**
- to 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 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 dialogicity 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

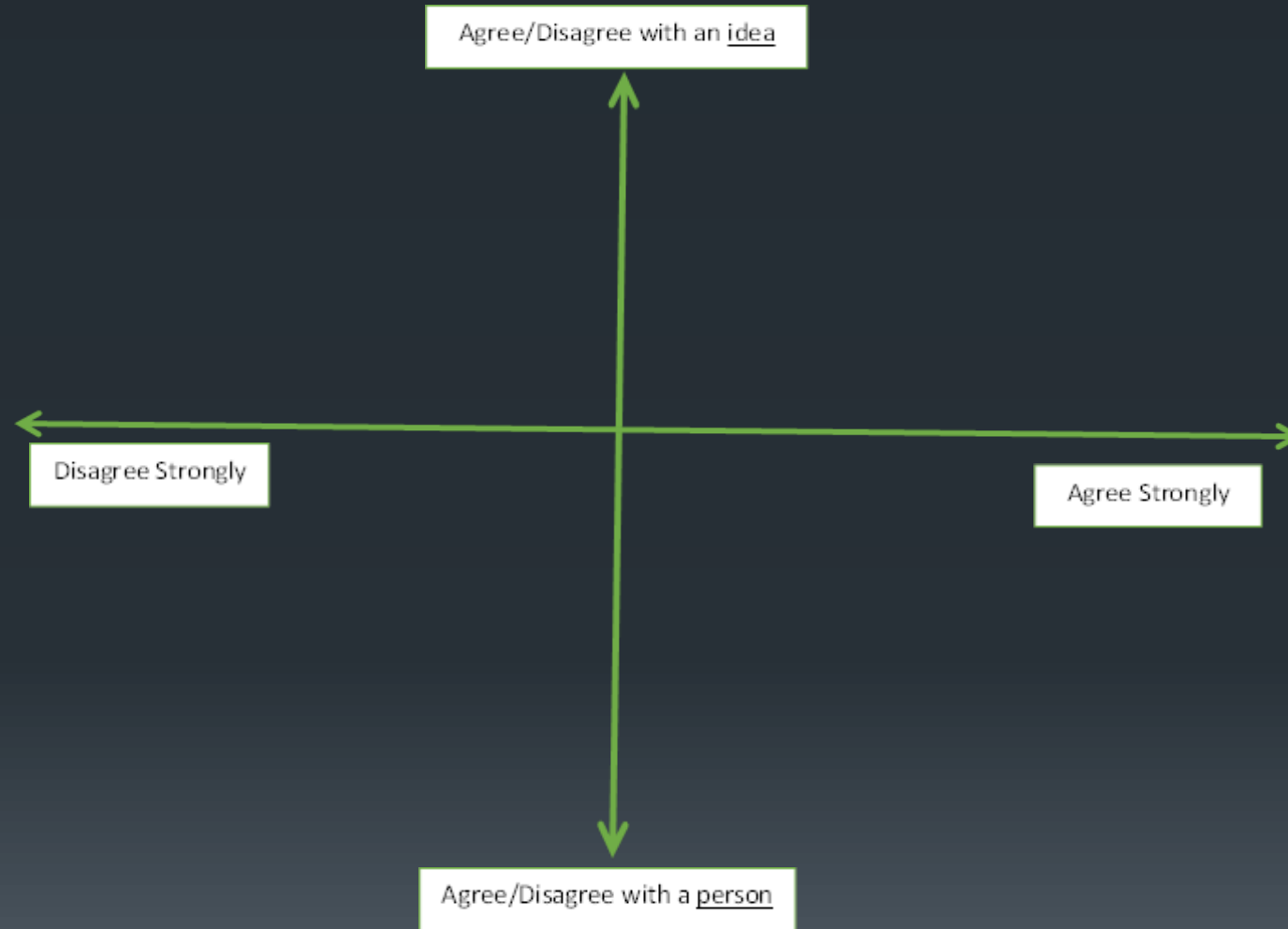
Useful phrases for evaluating ideas

- 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.

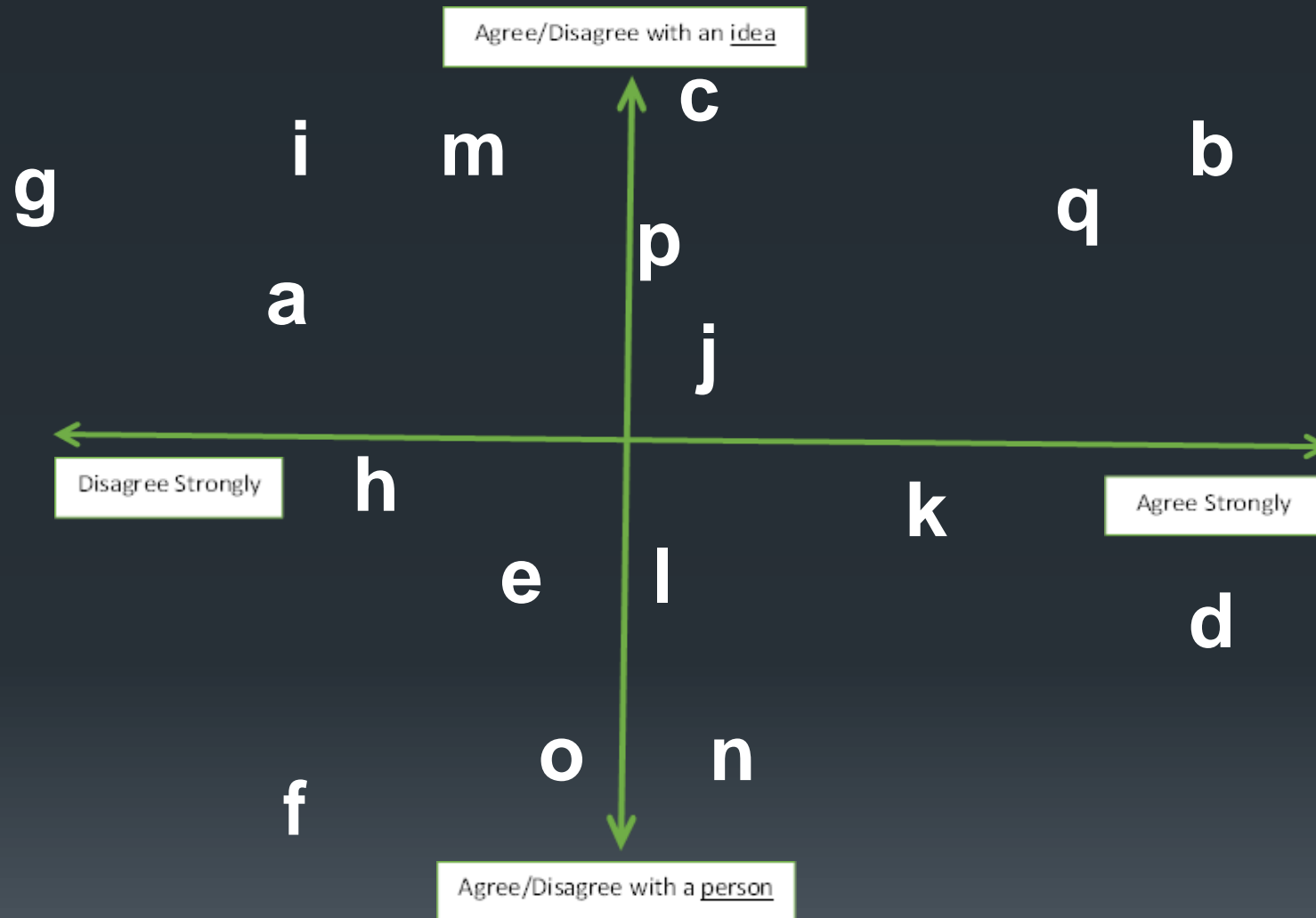
Useful phrases for evaluating ideas

- 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



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

Work through your individual 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.

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 21st Century defence and security environment has continued to intensify in complexity with an attended 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 conventional professional military educational practice, as it is, might be inadequate in equipping the educatees of these vital skills.

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

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THANK YOU