Fusing Music-Making and Storytelling to Facilitate Trust in a Heartfelt Team Dialogue

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the artistic side of dialogic interventions through a meeting design that combines music-making and storytelling. I facilitated six dialogues across four collectives with 20 participants. During the dialogue, each participant played a musical instrument called the handpan while simultaneously telling a story. Within two days of the meetings, participants described their experience of the dialogue through qualitative interviews and drawings. Findings show that fusing art with dialogue facilitated trust by creating conditions for relaxation, playfulness and presence. The dialogue also invited invitational reflexivity and relationality, which may contribute to group flourishing. The majority of participants felt heartfelt connections during moments of emotional convergence. Those who did not connect to anyone experienced uncontrolled mental noise and cautiousness. The study shows how the fusion of art and dialogue may facilitate trust, dialogic moments, and relational outcomes that could contribute to the relationality and inclusivity of a collective.

DEDICATION

To my parents. No podría escribir esto sin ustedes, y menos en un 2do idioma.

Gracias por invertir tanto dinero en mi educación—les debo muchísimo. Los amo a los dos.

And to my support system, those of you who invite me into your lives and

encourage me to be myself exactly as I am, for there is nothing wrong with me. Thank you

for your compassion, especially in times when I couldn't give it to myself.

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To my participants and volunteers (who had to tolerate very raw versions of the dialogue), it was a privilege to hear your stories. I am honored by your trust. Thank you. This dissertation is as much yours as it is mine.

To my family—Carmen, Poncho, Rodrigo and Daniel—thank you for wrapping me in a blanket of encouragement, support, and unconditional acceptance. You guys continue to show up for me, after all these years, in ways that bring me to tears. Thank you for loving me. And to my closest friends, in person and spirit, thank you. I cherish your presence, sense of humor, and depth. Thank you for making me feel beloved, special, and admired throughout this process.

As I say goodbye to academia, I want to thank "it" for its training. Focus, responsibility, ethics, rigor, and carefulness come to mind. I also met ridiculously smart and good-hearted people in this space–a rare combination–and for that I'm grateful.

This Ph.D. journey has been epic, yet not easy. I was able to complete it only because of the help of all of you–committee, friends, support system, ASU staff, participants, etc. **THANK YOU** from the bottom of my heart.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

I wanted to bring to life, not just a study, but also an experience that would be nourishing and fulfilling for my participants. I love humanity, I suppose, and bringing a little more light to the world in whatever way feels organic to me is the legacy I want to leave behind. Indeed, it was rewarding to see my participants enjoy the dialogue so much. But I'll tell you a little story as to another core reason why I created this study. One of my participants helped me to realize it.

During our interview, this participant was struggling to grasp the word "connection." He was trying to remember whether he felt it, but I saw him in a state of agitation and confusion. To bring some clarity, I shared the way I feel connection in my body—it's a tender softening in my chest. I slow down, I can't get my eyes off the person, and I can't help but to smile slightly, even if their story is that of pain, because of how much beauty I'm perceiving at that moment. Connection for me is not a strong feeling; it's quite soft, tender, yet impossible to go unnoticed.

He pondered on this softening I was talking about. He finally replied: "no, I did not experience that. But I saw you did." My jaw dropped, as he continued: "I saw you go through the experience you just described as you listened to everyone's stories. Out of everyone in the group, you seemed to me like the person who connected the most." I was shocked. Here I am, setting the conditions for my participants to connect, and not taking a step back to realize how much joy and heartfelt connection I'm experiencing during these dialogues. I was moved.

His testimony helped me realize—between you and I—that a part of me designed this specific dissertation as a gift to myself, as a chance to be nourished and fulfilled by seeing other people's hearts. And get a Ph.D. while I'm at it. Cheers.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Feel-good relationships contribute to individual (Seligman, 2011), group, and organizational flourishing. There is an interesting line of research called Dialogic Organizational Development (OD) that acknowledges the role of relationships in creating positive outcomes for a team. Yet, OD practices currently focus mainly on facilitating reflexivity and the reframing of situations with a more positive language (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004; Marshak & Grant, 2008; Oliver & Fitzgerald, 2013). OD practices could have even more impact if they cultivate feel-good interactions, a term Glaser (2016) used to explain participants' descriptions of trust: knowing they can express themselves with honesty and their words won't come back to hurt them.

Trust can open safe conversational openings in which people feel comfortable articulating new ideas, or pointing out defeating practices (brown; 2021; Glaser, 2016; Holman, 2013). These conversations alone may help shift a culture. Trust is also a key element in feel-good interactions and relationships.

The dialogue literature explains how to treat other humans in an ideal way—a way in which connection and trust may emerge (Buber, 1958; Cissna & Anderson, 1998; Johannesen, 1971; Rogers, 1951; Stewart et al., 2004). Art is an excellent resource to promote the kind of expressions dialogue scholars consider necessary for connection to emerge, for example, honesty (Gilboa et al., 2006; Wagner et al., 2016; Vougioukalou et al., 2019). It seems like artistic improvisation in the context of a dialogue that positions people to engage in an ideal quality of contact could set the conditions for heartfelt connection and trust. Fusing art and dialogue then may be a powerful way to facilitate trust.

For this dissertation, I designed a meeting that fused artistic improvisation with dialogue to set the conditions for trust and heartfelt connections (i.e., dialogic moments). The dialogue also invited new visions for the collectives I partnered up with. This study explores each participant's unique experience of this meeting, and my own. Participants' experiences contribute to our understanding of (a) how trust is created; (b) in what instances does heartfelt connection occur during dialogue; (c) what complicates heartfelt connection from emerging; (d) art's contribution to dialogue, and (e) the kind of relational outcomes that music-making and storytelling, in combination with dialogue, invite. In short, this dissertation advances our notion of trust and dialogue. It also provides facilitators/leaders with a meeting design they can facilitate in their own groups to (a) promote trust and/or connection, and (b) invite relationality and invitational reflexivity. This meeting is something I call "The Flow Technique."

I will use two writing styles in the findings section (i.e., research report with my own voice) to show the reader the ways in which the Flow Technique advances notions of trust, dialogue, and invites relational outcomes aligned with OD philosophy. The findings suggest that applying this meeting design with the right group creates a type of communication that may support positive relationships and thus contribute to the flourishing of that group.

Preview of Manuscript

This manuscript will unfold as follows: Chapter 2 introduces the Dialogic Organizational Development (OD) literature. It's important for the reader to understand the way dialogue is currently used in OD, and the reasons why these practices could be even more impactful by facilitating trust through prescriptive dialogue.

Chapter 3 overviews a prescriptive dialogue. The chapter also introduces the definition of dialogue and dialogic moments used in this dissertation. Chapter 4 explains the

ways in which artistic improvisation contributes to prescriptive dialogue, by stimulating the imagination and self-expression. For this reason, I positioned people to engage in a prescriptive dialogue that fuses artistic improvisation—specifically music-making and storytelling. Chapter 5 outlines (a) the dialogue design and the rationale for each of its sections (b) recruitment procedures and sample (c) a description of the data collected and (d) analysis procedures.

Chapter 6 presents the findings to the first research question: What did participants describe experiencing in and because of the Flow Technique that promoted trust, dialogue, and/or dialogic moments, if anything? Participants experienced a deep relaxation during the dialogue. The chapter shows that playfulness and presence contributed to relaxation, which promoted trust and/or dialogic moments.

Chapter 7 presents the findings to RQ2, which is divided into two parts. First: In which moments, if any, did the listener feel a heartfelt connection with another participant during the dialogue? Second: What did participants describe experiencing that made it more difficult for dialogic moments to emerge during the Flow Technique? The chapter shows that participants experienced dialogic moments (i.e., heartfelt connections) during moments of emotional convergence. Yet, some heartfelt connections were not always reciprocated. Furthermore, some participants experienced extreme difficulty falling into dialogic moments due to mental noise and cautiousness.

Chapter 8 presents the findings to RQ3: What relational outcomes does the Flow Technique invite? The chapter shows how participants engaged in invitational reflexivity through the use of the Flow Technique. Participants also felt an appreciation for the people that participated in the dialogue, and engaged in inviting-accepting cycles once the dialogue ended—what I call relationality.

Chapter 9 discusses the implications of these findings. I offer five theoretical contributions: (a) experiencing relaxation is a component of experiencing trust (b) dialogic moments emerge in some cases when the listener had an experience that is similar to the speaker's experience, (c) dialogic moments can be one-sided (d) mental noise and cautiousness can make it difficult for dialogic moments to emerge, and (e) fusing music-making with storytelling contributes to dialogue by facilitating stories that are rich in personal details.

I also offer practical contributions regarding the Flow Technique. I recommend leaders use the Flow Technique to (a) promote trust and connection with a small group, and (b) invite relationality and invitational reflexivity within a small group. Yet, given that this dialogue facilitates stories with rich personal details, I also recommend that leaders (c) consider when not to use the Flow Technique.

The Flow Technique could serve as a methodology to invite relational outcomes that may help to communicatively constitute trust, and organizational flourishing. However, this claim is only speculative at this point and requires further research, which I will address in Chapter 9 along with the study's limitations and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

DIALOGIC ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dialogic Organizational Development, which I will refer to as OD from now on, is a line of research that focuses on changing a social system's conversations as the primary method for changing the system's reality (Marshak & Grant, 2008). OD researchers seek to understand an organization's communication. They then use that knowledge to help the organization create new outcomes through changes in language and interactional dynamics.

OD practitioners make certain assumptions about reality that guide their practices. First, they assume that reality is socially constructed, meaning that language does not reflect but creates reality (Cunliffe, 2004). The experience of "being" is a linguistic experience. We experience something the moment we attach meaning in the form of words to objects, people, and situations (Souba, 2014). "They ain't nothing until I call them," says Littlejohn et al. (2017, p. 9). Words are a tool for creating both interpretations and realities.

Without discourse, there is no social reality (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004). OD then seeks to shift a group's discourse to help them create new realities. New words can recontextualize challenges, create new visions, and lead to new outcomes (Souba, 2014).

Some scholars consider that the ongoing language exchange that occurs between members—through conversations, emails, meetings, and texts—is the main force that produces an organization (Brummans et al., 2014; Fairhust & Putman, 2004; Schoeneborn et al., 2019). The organization is a labyrinth of conversations (Souba, 2014) that is in a constant state of becoming because the cycle of conversations never ends (Fairhust & Putman, 2004).

OD honors conversations as the space where individuals construct meaning, whether they know it or not, by talking about a situation (Barge & Fairhurst, 2008; Heracleous & Marshak, 2004; Jian & Fairhurst, 2017). Those meanings position people to

act in certain ways. Therefore, the content of a group's conversations must affect what the group creates. In OD, the practitioner and the participants assume the following: (a) the organization resides in conversations, (b) changing the conversation changes the organization's outcome, (c) relationality also constitutes the organization.

To change a group's conversation, an OD facilitator asks the team to first observe and reflect on their own communication (i.e., reflexivity). An OD practitioner starts a facilitation by presenting a team with problematic narratives found in their language so they may reflect on the impact of those narratives (Oliver & Fitzgerald, 2013). The practitioner also seeks dominant yet unsaid storylines that shape discussions and brings them to the team's attention (Marshak, 2013). The exploration of unsaid assumptions can lead to an exploration of "big D" Discourses—views so deeply inculcated since birth that members are unconscious of them (Cunliffe, 2004). By talking about the team's unspoken assumptions and big "D" Discourses, new meanings of a situation can arise (Cunliffe, 2004).

The next step to change the team's language is by asking the team to make new communicative choices (i.e., reframing). Facilitators invite a team to reframe a situation through restorying and appreciative inquiry (Rosile et al., 2013). Restorying, for example, is a way of reconstructing stories by externalizing the problem-saturated stories, letting people see them, and then letting them construct a more desirable narrative.

The second assumption that OD practitioners make is that reality is relational, that is, co-constructed. Whoever we bring to the team will influence, to some extent, the worldview of other team members and potentially our own. We will also influence theirs. Below I'll describe the role of relationality and how facilitated dialogue can shift interactional dynamics, which is relevant to OD and the study at hand.

Relationality

Relationality assumes that meaning is co-constructed by two or more people (Jian & Fairhurst, 2017). Furthermore, whoever we engage in conversation may influence us. A relationship matters because it can materialize new realities through the exchange of meanings. We mutually shape our emotions, worldviews, and actions (Cunliffe, 2004; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

Although OD acknowledges the role of relationships in the creation of reality, there is little OD work done to cultivate work relationships outside of facilitated dialogue. I am particularly interested in that specific area—the quality of contact between team members that makes space for "flourishing" conversations and collectives.

A flourishing individual is one who experiences: positive emotions (including happiness); engagement (losing track of time while doing an activity), meaning (perceiving one's work to be grander than the self); accomplishment (winning and succeeding); and positive relationships (feeling loved) (Seligman, 2011). A flourishing team has to be composed then of individuals who are flourishing—individuals who experience happiness, feel motivated, have the conditions to produce their best work, and enjoy feel-good relationships including at work, where we spend 40 hours a week.

For the purpose of this study, I want to highlight the role of positive relationships in human flourishing. Those positive relationships are not limited to life outside of work. Positive relationships (i.e., feeling loved) in the workplace also contributes to individual flourishing. Relationships are then not only a space where meaning is constructed, but a space that contributes to the flourishing of both individuals and social systems.

"If we take seriously that organizations are constituted by communication, it seems natural that attention should be devoted to constituting the human communication that

make up flourishing and functioning organizations" (Tracy & Donovan, 2018, p. 206). To me, this phrase speaks about creating the conditions for communication that makes up a flourishing group. Given the importance of positive and feel-good relationships in human flourishment, attention should be devoted to how to set the conditions for positive relationships in the workplace. The way teammates treat each other and the safe conversational openings that emerge from that quality of contact could contribute to a system's flourishing in a way that OD could further explore. Indeed, wouldn't it be interesting to consider how aspects like human connection and art might play a role in OD?

So far, I've reviewed how OD views humans as rational beings who can change their behavior through rational choices (i.e., a change in language). OD tends to focus on conversation as an agent to change, but certainly other aspects of issues that are nonverbal may also make a difference. A conversation can only go so far in terms of exploration, or playful promiscuous thought, depending on how comfortable the group feels with each other. Furthermore, it will be difficult for an individual to explore subconscious, self-defeating narratives, articulate the consequences of those narratives, and then share their greatest aspirations while feeling comfortable and safe if they don't trust the team. Feelings are important drivers of behavior.

OD approaches may have even more impact when a dialogue sets the conditions for "feel-good" conversations in which an individual can speak with transparency while knowing his expression won't come back to hurt him (Glaser, 2016). In short, setting the conditions for trust. Below I will explain how trust has been described in the work setting. Then I will explain the ways in which trust, conceptualized as a feel-good interaction in which safe conversational openings can emerge (Glaser, 2016), may serve an organization.

Cultivating Trust for Organizational Development

Trust in the workplace has been conceptualized as integrity—a match between what a person says and does (brown, 2021). People become trustworthy when they do what they say and say what they do. This integrity cultivates trustworthiness that improves the person's professionalism and workability.

There is another flavor of trust, the type that allows for safe conversational openings (Glaser, 2016; Holman, 2013). This flavor of trust appears as a feel-good interaction where honest speech can emerge without repercussions. Glaser (2016), executive coach and leadership consultant, explains:

> In our research over thirty years, trust is brought up as a key descriptor of a good conversation. People will say "I feel open and trusting. I could say what's on my mind." Or "I don't have to edit anything, and I can trust it won't come back to hurt me." (p. 4)

This quote conceptualizes trust as a feel-good interaction in which the other feels safe to behave and speak candidly. This flavor of trust Glaser (2016) refers to, or quality of contact between humans, could serve a collective's development in several ways. First, trust builds relationships (Glaser, 2016). Second, trust allows members to articulate defeating practices; a communicative act that may shift an organizational culture (Holman, 2013). These conversations may look like talking about issues, conflicts, worries, and frustrations without fear of reappraisal. It is particularly difficult to break a culture of isolation, martyrdom, and burnout when people share nothing about their personal lives out of fear or lack of trust (brown, 2021).

Third, trust nurtures the exchange of innovative ideas. For creativity to emerge, team members must trust that they can share even the wildest idea without being criticized or shut down. Yet, where trust lacks, the sharing of personal and valuable stories falters.

Practitioners could consider ways to cultivate trust, or a quality of contact that allows for feel-good interactions, given the importance of relationality in human flourishing and OD. Both Glaser (2016) and brown (2021)—facilitators and organizational consultants for over 20 years—emphasize the importance of moving a team away from fear and into trustful states. The question is how.

The Convergence of Organizational Development, Trust, and Dialogue

Cultivating trust in collectives can happen in a variety of ways. Glaser (2016) used to train people one-on-one, teaching them to avoid attacks, blames, and critiques. These communications styles will set someone into fight or flight and move them into a state of defensiveness rather than openness (Goleman, 2005; Van der Kolk, 2014). So to cultivate trust, Glaser (2016) taught organizational actors how to avoid scaring others through their communication.

To facilitate trust, brown (2021) positions people in a way that "authentic selves" interact. The authentic interaction consists of inviting the individual to show parts they don't typically show, especially in organizational settings where people hide these parts underneath masks. The interaction between "authentic selves" occurs first in dyads and then happens in groups.

I find it interesting that practitioners and scholars from parallel fields— organizational development and dialogue—converge on an ideal way to relate. For example, brown's cultivation of trust (i.e., authentic selves interacting) is bolstered by two communication researchers who advocate for courageous self-disclosure in dialogue

10

(Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008). Glaser's communication training to avoid scaring others is congruent to the way two dialogue philosophers explain a way of relating that is rooted in unconditional positive regard (Buber, 1958; Rogers, 1951). At this point, I wish to introduce the reader to a field parallel to organizational development yet with similar philosophies: the field of dialogue.

The field of prescriptive dialogue, in particular, describes the ideal quality of contact needed to engage in deeply meaningful conversations. This quality of contact can lead to connection. In short, the prescriptive dialogue field has been exploring since the early 20th century ideal ways of relating to create a positive relationship. The field of OD could set the conditions for its members to engage in this quality of contact that, if pursued over time, may create safe conversational openings that may (or may not) shift the system's language and support organizational flourishing through positive relationships.

The next chapter will therefore review prescriptive dialogue. I will then explain the ways in which fusing dialogue with artistic improvisation may cultivate a feel-good interaction that serves collective flourishing through the cultivation of trust.

CHAPTER 3

DIALOGUE

The word "dialogue" is used under different contexts and for different purposes. For example, a dialogue can be a meeting to promote everyone's best thinking (Kaner, 2014), explore assumptions (Barge & Little, 2002), or reflect on a team's communication (Hedman-Phillips & Barge, 2017). Dialogue can also be a meeting to find peace between historically divided groups (Broome, 2013). It can be a meaningful exchange between two people (Cissna & Anderson, 2002). The dialogue field is vast, and the word itself has different meanings. Yet, any dialogue is supposed to bring possibilities into existence (Nadal, 2010).

OD practitioners tend to facilitate team dialogues, or meetings, to help a system create new outcomes through a change of language. The meetings are talk-centric and goal oriented. There is another type of dialogue, however, that is less interested in changing the group's language. With this dialogue, it is through the beauty of the interaction that participants walk away from the encounter transformed, even if just a little. This study concerns the latter—a facilitated prescriptive dialogue: a meeting where people are positioned to engage in a quality of contact that sets the conditions for dialogic moments (Barge, 2017; Stewart et al., 2004). Henceforth in this document, when I use the word "dialogue," I will be specifically and only referring to facilitated prescriptive dialogue.

To provide a more in-depth understanding of dialogue, I will review the two elements that comprise it. First, I will review what the literature suggests is an ideal quality of human contact that sets the conditions for dialogic moments. Then, I will review what the literature suggests constitutes a dialogic moment.

<center>**What Makes for a Strong Relationship Between Humans**</center>

Prescriptive approaches to dialogue reserve the term dialogue "for a particular quality or type of relating" (Stewart et al., 2004, p. 21). This type of relating is perceived as ideal yet rare (Barge, 2017). Martin Buber's "I/Thou" philosophy (Buber, 1958) and Carl Roger's person-centered approach to psychotherapy (Rogers, 1951) strongly influenced the quality of contact we assume to be ideal between humans and can lead to dialogic moments. Below, I will describe what Buber and Rogers assumed this rare yet ideal quality of contact between humans looks like.

Martin Buber's I/Thou Relation

Buber's (1878–1965) firsthand experience with two World Wars highly influenced his call for an improved quality of contact between humans. He was interested in how to relate, or how to exist in relation to another. Buber (1958) proposed an I/Thou relation as an ideal relation—when both speakers understand the other's views and see the uniqueness of that human. In this human-to-human relation, we do not impose our view on another (Buber, 1958). We don't use the other or see them as means to an end.

Buber (1958) encouraged relationality (I/Thou) as opposed to make use of another person (I/It). Buber (1958) warned us that manipulation is what transforms a relationship (Thou) into a means-to-an end (It) interaction where we use another for our advantage. The fact that Buber was focused on the avoidance of an I/It world suggests that an ideal relationship is one where we avoid manipulation, control over another, or perceiving someone as a means to an end.

Rather, Buber's concept of dialogue (cited in Cissna & Anderson, 2002) is an embodied practice of turning toward the other with honesty and with an openness to hear a response. An I/Thou relation is a space in which we gain insight of self and others (Buber,

<center>13</center>

1958). Contemporary authors have described the I/Thou relation as a conversation that facilitates mutual awareness (Cissna & Anderson, 1994) and moves people to engage the full complexity and humanity of each other (Barge, 2017). An ideal quality of contact between humans is one where we see the complexity of self and others.

Buber (1958) was so passionate about the value of relationality that he even described love as the responsibility to care for a relationship. He emphasized the importance of continually renewing relational processes, otherwise, the world "freezes into the It-world which is broken only intermittently by the eruptive, glowing deeds of solitary spirits" (Buber & Kaufmann, 1970, p.103). Buber suggested loving another by treating the 3rd entity (the relationship) carefully.

Carl Rogers and Martin Buber were acquaintances and their views at times overlapped (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). Rogers contributed valuable insight that compliments the I/Thou notion. These elements constitute the person-centered approach to psychotherapy, which I overview below.

Carl Rogers's Person-Centered Approach

Carl Rogers's (1902–1987) upbringing informs his person-centered approach to psychotherapy. He grew up in a rural area noticing that plants didn't need instruction on how to grow but simply the conditions to grow (e.g., sunlight, water, soil). He applied this observation to his relationship with clients. The right conditions for growth rely on the quality of contact (the relationship) between the therapist and the client (Corey, 2015).

Rogers considered that an ideal quality of contact has a non-evaluative orientation toward the other (Corey, 2015). Rather, Rogers advocated for unconditional positive regard—a relationship where nothing can obscure one's image of the other (Corey, 2015). The person communicates a baseline acceptance and lets the other be without external

judgments to fix or impose change (Cissna & Anderson, 2002). The other has permission to

be and feel whatever without fearing that he/she/they will be considered less worthy in the

relationship. This is relevant to the study at hand because it suggests that an ideal quality of

contact for connection is one in which we interact non-evaluatively, without considering the

other less worthy in the relationship, or requiring fixing.

The Overlap Between an I/Thou Relation and the Person-Centered Approach

Buber and Rogers's ideal quality of contact had at least three overlapping concepts:

mutuality; confirmation/unconditional positive regard, and authenticity/congruence. Like

Buber, Rogers considered that an ideal quality of contact is that in which insights about self

and the other can occur (i.e., mutuality) (Cissna & Anderson, 2002). A relationship in which

two people are showing themselves openly and recognizing each other. Connection then

may emerge in conversations where there is mutuality.

Similar to Rogers's "positive regard," Buber believed in confirmation, or "acceptance

of otherness" (as cited in Cissna & Anderson, 2002, p. 54). Every person wants to be

"confirmed," or validated (Buber, 1958). One can accept the other and simultaneously

disagree or disapprove of their actions. Yet, Buber believed all humans needed confirmation,

and humanity depended on its members confirming/validating one another. The lack of

acceptance constitutes the weakness of the human race (Cissna & Anderson, 2002). Dialogic

moments then may emerge in conversations rooted in total acceptance and validation of the

other.

Buber also encouraged authenticity. Although not requiring full disclosure, partners

should not pretend with one another either. Rogers referred to authenticity as

"congruence"—being real, not pretending, and not assuming a facade (Cissna & Anderson,

2002). Rogers explained congruence as the combination of experience, awareness, and overt

15

communication. The closer the overlap between a person's experience, awareness of that experience, and the communication of that awareness, the more congruent the person is; yet, no one fully achieves this condition (Cissna & Anderson, 2002). This is relevant because it suggests an ideal quality of contact for connection happens when two people are not pretending with one another but communicating self-awareness with transparency. Contemporary scholars have also emphasized the importance of transparency as an ideal way to relate (Johannesen, 1971; Stewart et al., 2004). Conversation partners trust that others speak from a moral stance of honesty and that their speaking is not fundamentally strategic or tactical (Cissna & Anderson, 2002).

Contemporary scholars emphasized one more characteristic in an ideal relation: presence. Presence has been articulated as full concentration on the encounter (Johannesen, 1971; Stewart et al., 2004); temporarily suspending judgments (Cissna & Anderson, 1994; Johannesen, 1971) and attentive listening (Cissna & Anderson, 2002). Presence, at its most basic level, means making oneself available (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). Furthermore, the speaker is uninterested in manifesting a specific outcome from the encounter; they are in the now, not in the past or the future (Cissna and Anderson, 1994).

This study set out to facilitate feel-good interactions that promote trust, especially in workplace groups. Above, I reviewed what Buber and Rogers suggested is an ideal way of relating to another person so a positive relation may emerge. Although they did not use words like trust or feel-good interactions, they believed I/Thou relations (e.g., mutuality, validation) and a person-centered approach (e.g., congruence, non-evaluative attitude) led to relationality, and even healing.

Their influence on the dialogue field was so significant that, even today, facilitators sometimes ask dialogue participants to embody the quality of contact Rogers and Buber

considered ideal (e.g., honesty, unconditional acceptance). When people are positioned to relate in this rare yet ideal quality of contact, a safe space can be born (Barge, 2017; Maoz & Ellis, 2006; Schwarz, 2002). The safe space is that in which people feel comfortable playing and honestly sharing their thoughts and feelings (Rohd, 1998). The safe space that emerges as people relate to each other in an I/Thou way or a Person-Centered approach opens up the possibility for dialogic moments. In short, by somehow positioning people to relate in the way Buber and Rogers suggested, a special moment may occur between them. These special moments are known as dialogic moments.

<center>**Dialogic Moments**</center>

What makes a dialogue "a dialogue" are its dialogic moments. Whether emerging from orchestrated meetings or one-on-one conversations, dialogic moments are considered fleeting and special (Barge, 2017). The work of six scholars elucidates these moments (Cissna & Anderson 1994, 1998, 2002; Baxter, 2004; Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001; Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008). I will start by reviewing the way philosophers conceptualized dialogic moments, explained by Cissna and Anderson (2002) and Baxter (2004). Then I will review what contemporary communication scholars suggest dialogic moments look like based on empirical data.

Dialogic Moment as a Change of Perception

Buber and Rogers agreed that dialogic moments are brief moments of meeting in which there is mutuality, or a mutual recognition—a conversation in which two people happen to one another. Buber (as cited in Cissna & Anderson, 1998) also refers to dialogic moments as two people seeing God in each other. Cissna and Anderson (1998) summarized the Buber-Rogers position on dialogic moments:

<center>17</center>

The basic character of such a dialogic moment, therefore, is the experience of inventive surprise shared by the dialogic partners as each "turns toward" the other and both mutually perceive the impact of each other's turning. It is a brief interlude of focused awareness and acceptance of otherness and difference that somehow simultaneously transcends the perception of difference itself. (p. 74)

In short, a dialogic moment is a mutual acceptance of difference that simultaneously transcends the perception of difference. It is a perception of unity (Baxter, 2004).

I wish to now turn to Baxter, who has dedicated a part of her career to study a Russian author called Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin (1895–1975) is a much lesser known philosopher in the US compared to Buber or Rogers. His work was slow to reach publication and even slower to receive an English translation given the communists (Lenin) and fascists (Stanlin) regimes in the Soviet Union at the time (see Baxter, 2004). Yet, his writings on dialogic moments informed Baxter and DeGooyer's (2001) operationalization of dialogic moments so I will briefly review Bakhtin's notion of dialogic moments.

The dialogic moment, according to Bahktin (as cited in Baxter, 2004), is perceiving and responding to one another as whole beings, not fragments of a being. The dialogic moment arises when we perceive not just one but several facets of a person. For the shift of perception to occur, people must show more than one facet, or what Barge (2017) referred to as their humanity in its full complexity. The individual opens up parts of herself she doesn't typically show, so others may see it. A dialogic moment then can be the recognition of a human as multifaceted (Baxter, 2004).

Dialogic Moment as an Emotion

Bakhtin also perceived dialogic moments as an aesthetic moment filled with emotion. "The aesthetic experience is first and foremost an emotional one"—a feeling of pleasure, joy

or awe in the face of something regarded as beautiful (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001, p. 1). It is through the perceived beauty of a conversation that parties fall into a dialogic moment—a feeling of pleasure and joy (Baxter, 2004).

Buber and Rogers talked about a dialogic moment as a feeling of surprise (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). Shotter (1993a) described the Buber-Rogers position on dialogic moments as therapeutic communication that is rooted in a special moment in which "therapists share with their clients, not so much understandings as feelings, thus to establish with them something of a common ground, a shared … basis" (p. 120). Here we see Shotter summarize a dialogic moment as a feeling that establishes a shared ground. The feeling is deep, immersing, and enveloping (Cissna & Anderson, 1994).

In short, when humans relate in an I/Thou or Person-Centered way, a dialogic moment may occur. This moment can be a change of perception, from a one-dimensional human to a multifaceted human. It can also be a change of perception, from difference to unity. A dialogic moment can be an enveloping feeling of pleasure or joy in the face of a beautiful conversation. It can be a feeling of surprise, or a feeling that establishes a common ground with another.

As inspiring as all these explanations are, we know little about what dialogic moments actually look like in life as lived. In fact, a critique against the dialogue literature is that, although vast, it can also be "highly philosophical" and lacking in data-based findings (Montague, 2012, p. 397). There are, to my knowledge, three communication studies that offer qualitative empirical evidence to "show" dialogic moments in life as lived (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001; Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008). Two in particular are informing the operationalization of dialogic moments for this study. I will, therefore, review each of these studies next.

19

Operationalization of Dialogic Moments

The three studies I will review next understood a dialogic moment as a feeling, yet, these feelings had two slightly different flavors. A dialogic moment could be (a) any emotion in response to a beautiful conversation, or (b) a clear and strong feeling of heartfelt connection toward the other. In what follows, I review the data collected by these researchers, and the definitions of dialogic moments that emerged.

Dialogic Moment as an Emotion in Response to a Beautiful Conversation

Informed by Bakhtin, Baxter and DeGooyer (2001) operationalized a dialogic moment as an emotional response to a communication episode perceived as beautiful. They asked participants to write about conversations that elicited an emotional response of aesthetic pleasure or "conversations … that you would describe as beautiful." (p. 6) Participants were each asked to recall a highly aesthetic conversation that, if a work of art, "would merit hanging on a wall or sitting on a pedestal to be admired for its beauty, elegance, and artistic grace." (p. 6) Each participant identified and wrote what happened during what they deemed a beautiful conversation with friends, partners, or family members. Baxter and DeGooyer collected writings from 236 individuals, mostly college females.

The most popular conversation deemed as beautiful happened when the participant felt somehow better, improved, affirmed, or valued through the interaction (e.g., "my husband lavished me with his undivided attention"). The three next most beautiful conversations happened when the dyad talked about constructing a future together, talked about their current relationship in the present, or discussed their relationship in the past. The study led Baxter (2004) to conceptualize a dialogic moment as a joint performance (a ritual) in which both people pay homage to their relationship.

20

Dialogic Moment as a Clear, Deep and Strong Heartfelt Connection

Poulos (2008) wrote an autoethnography in which he draws on different conversations, particularly with his son and his mother, to explain what he calls accidental dialogue: "moments when it becomes clear that a strong, heartfelt connection is made between humans" (Poulos, 2008, p. 117). He doesn't define "heartfelt connection," yet deems the interaction as "a rare and eventful moment in which people somehow manage to share a special connection—a deeper moment.…" (p. 117). The person's willingness for this connection matters.

Poulos (2008) finds that accidental dialogue happens when we show up with "a desire to connect," "a capacity for risk," and "a love for possibility." In short, what he calls "an open heart" (p. 133). There is a beauty to the moment, which he describes as "a moment of conversion, a moment of spirit rising, a moment of ecstasy. It is a moment where the light of truth and co-being and joyous engagement infuses the human spirit" (p. 119). The dialogic moment then is an inspiring exchange between humans. The person walks out transformed, if only a little, from the encounter. Poulos talks about the courage not just to self-disclose but to allow oneself to be transformed by what another person said and potentially break long-held structures of identity (Cissna & Anderson, 1994).

The most recent data-based study exploring dialogic moments comes from Montague (2012) who, like Poulos, defines a dialogic moment as connection. Montague asked 28 participants to tell him about a "memorable, fulfilling, or emotionally rewarding conversation" they had with another person (p. 402). The conversation may be seen as a breakthrough in participants' relationship with that person. He proceeded to analyze the interviews and illuminate the communicative patterns that allow for the creation of dialogic moments.

As each individual described their identified conversations, Montague (2012) found what he calls an "inviting-accepting cycle." Dyads went through a cycle of extending and accepting invitations to interact. By accepting an invitation, the person is also extending an invitation to interact. The cycle can last months or years; there really isn't a number. Eventually, one person will trust the other enough to share a part of herself that is not evident; a part that others can't see and only she has access to. The relational partner can make space for that self-disclosure by asking deep questions and reassuring the person that she won't be judged.

Trust is an important component of falling into these moments of deep connection. When it finally happens, the dialogic moment is a "rare and lively moment in which participants experience a profound connection with another person" (Montague, 2012, p. 398). The profound connection happened when "participants finally shared a part of themselves they were not revealing to everyone and most importantly this disclosure was met with genuine acceptance" (p. 413). Moments like this can deepen a relationship and indeed transcend perceptions of difference.

It is worth noting that these studies analyzed participants' narrations of beautiful or emotionally rewarding conversations that happened potentially years ago. Participants' memories of the encounter were not necessarily vivid. Furthermore, the three studies by Baxter and DeGooyer (2001), Poulos (2008), and Montague (2012) did not explore the perceptions of both members of the dyad. We don't know if the dialogic moment—the rare and deep event, the awe in the face of a beautiful conversation, the strong heartfelt connection—was experienced by both people. All three studies collected data from one individual and explored that individual's perception of the communicative event, a limitation

Montague (2012) himself recognizes. The field could use more empirical studies to explore

dialogic moments from the perspectives of both people or a group.

Summary

A dialogue, for the purpose of this study, is a meeting in which people are positioned

to engage in a quality of contact that sets the conditions for dialogic moments (Barge, 2017;

Stewart et al., 2014). This quality of contact is influenced by Buber's I/Thou relation (Buber,

1958) and Roger's person-centered approach to psychotherapy (Rogers, 1951).

Contemporary facilitators have clarified additional etiquettes of behavior that create a safe

space for potential dialogic moments (Cissna & Anderson, 1994; Johannesen, 1971; Stewart

et al., 2014).

Participants fall into a dialogic moment in unexpected ways. Sometimes it happens

when one person reveals a part of herself unknown to others and the other welcomes this

part (Montague, 2012). Sometimes it happens when the depth, beauty, and confirmation of

love that happens in a conversation creates an emotion of joy, awe or pleasure (Baxter &

DeGooyer, 2001). Sometimes it happens when the two people's spirits rise to a

conversation, which makes the conversation inspiring (Poulos, 2008). What is clear is that a

dialogic moment is brief and felt in the body.

Collectively then, for the purpose of this study, a dialogic moment is: a special and

brief moment (Barge, 2017; Cissna & Anderson, 1994) of perceived deep, strong, and

obvious heartfelt connection (Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008) with another human.

The Convergence of Trust, Dialogue, and Art

Dialogic moments are relevant to this study since I set out to facilitate feel-good

interactions (i.e., trust) across colleagues. This trust may serve OD practices and the overall

flourishing of a group. The field of dialogue has offered ways of relating so that safe

conversational openings arise--the kind of openings organizational consultants advocate for and call trust. A brief yet deep heartfelt connection with another may also emerge from this way of relating.

To give birth to a beautiful conversation that makes space for connection and trust, I created a dialogue design that fuses art. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the rationale for adding art, specifically improvisation, to a dialogue. I will then introduce the research questions for this study followed by the dialogue and research design

CHAPTER 4

ART'S CONTRIBUTION TO DIALOGUE

Dan (listening to music and watching a boy skate): That's what I like about music.

Gretta: What?

Dan: One of the most banal scenes is suddenly invested with so much meaning. All

these banalities, they are suddenly turned into these beautiful, effervescent pearls.

–John Carney, *Begin Again* [film], 2013

If there is an industry invested in creating beauty, it is the art industry in all of its

forms. The above excerpt—during a scene in the film about two musicians who walk around

New York while listening to music—summarizes what art accomplishes: it somehow

transforms something ordinary into something special. Baxter and DeGooyer (2001) remind

us that experiencing beauty—in a house, in clothes, in food—contributes to a sense of life

being worthwhile.

Art and dialogue are no stranger to one another. In recent years, facilitators have

published work on the artistic practices they bring to group facilitation (Boske, 2020; Gilboa

et al., 2006; Johnson, 2020; LeBaron & Alexander, 2020; Pelias & Shaffer, 2007; Rohd, 1998;

Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Sunwolf, 2006; Vougioukalou et al., 2019). Some of these

facilitators are communication pracademics (i.e., scholars and practitioners), others are

trained artists, and others are therapists. In this chapter, I review aspects from the

performance, facilitation, and family music therapy literature to explain the ways in which art

contributes to dialogue.

We can begin understanding art's contribution to dialogue by first understanding the

elements of dialogue design. Perhaps most importantly, the facilitator wants to design

activities that invite self-expression (Holman, 2013; Maoz & Ellis, 2006). In addition to this, Rohd (1998) suggests adding activities that make participants interact with each other, and question the way things are (i.e., criticality). Barge and Andreas (2013) suggest activities that allow participants to understand, among other aspects, (a) a capacity for developing new forms of talk; (b) capturing the imagination and creativity; and (c) focusing on the unfolding of conversation over time.

Adding art to a dialogue, and improvisation in particular, can help team members develop new forms of talk and capture their creativity. Below, I will describe the ways in which improvisation stimulates imagination and self-expression. This is relevant to the study at hand because a dialogue that fuses artistic improvisation, and thus stimulates the imagination and self-expression, may allow for a type of communication that promotes trust and/or dialogic moments.

Improvisation

Improvisation is a space for spontaneous and free expression, with no scripts, guidelines or rules, and no evaluation of aesthetic criteria (Nemesh, 2016; Vougioukalou, et al., 2019). Improvisation is considered a form of play in the sense that it can be a fun activity that invites the person to explore without limitations, and imagine (Nemesh, 2016; Lord, 2012; Rohd, 1998).

Improvisation to Stimulate the Imagination

When individuals improvise an artistic piece, they seem to form new perspectives and imagine new visions. One of the ways in which art seems to stimulate the imagination is through inspiration. LeBaron and Alexander (2020), facilitators who design dialogues for organizational transformation, suggest bringing music, dance, song, painting, and awe inducing experiences into transformational processes. Art's beauty can inspire people to re-

imagine an aspect of their work in new ways (LeBaron & Alexander, 2020). Art contributes to dialogue by inspiring individuals to imagine a new perspective of an old situation.

Another way in which art seems to contribute to dialogue is through playfulness. Johnson (2020) collected empirical data (i.e., observations, photographs, and dialogue transcriptions) of their work with the Justice Fleet—a social justice movement that combines improvisation, play, and dialogue. They divided participants into small groups and gave each group a box with legos, wood blocks, magnets, figurines and other toys. The group played with the toys to recreate a community they perceived as just. The activity was followed by a group conversation.

The reconstruction of a miniature community using toys, a form of expression inspired by play therapy, stimulates a radical, decolonized imagination—a thinking "beyond constraints." (Johnson, 2020, p. 84) Johnson's (2020) data suggest that imagination can be unleashed through play, so much so that they consider their dialogue design a "methodological and organizational gem." (p. 83) They call for more research rooted in play to collect data that otherwise wouldn't be collected, and create visions that otherwise wouldn't have emerged. This is relevant to the current study because it suggests that improvisation stimulates the imagination, and thus contributes to dialogue, by positioning people to play. Furthermore, Johnson's call for similar research is relevant. It suggests that my dissertation study may be adding data-based findings to a body of work that aims to create new methods of small group transformation through improv, play, and dialogue.

Facilitators also ask participants to improvise sketches to stimulate their imagination. Noah and Mica Scalin, for example, are painters who invite leaders to paint. Coca Cola and Gap hired their service so that, by engaging in artistic improvisation, leaders could be more imaginative (Another Limited Rebellion, n.d.).

27

In short, there seems to be a connection between improvised art-making, play, and imagination. Art-making may inspire people to re-imagine old visions. Art-making may also promote a playful liberation of the imagination. One of art's contributions to dialogue then may be to inspire new visions for the collective through its playfulness and stimulation of the imagination.

Asides from stimulating the imagination, research also shows that the improvisation of music, dance, and sketches facilitates self-awareness and self-expression. Art's cultivation of self-awareness and self-expression is crucial if we aim to set the conditions for dialogic moments.

Improvisation as Facilitator for Self-Awareness and Self Expression

Art-making can bring to the surface emotion, stories, and issues that are difficult to articulate or even unconscious (Singhall & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2015). Improvisation, in particular, is a way of discovering information about the self. In the performance field, improvisation is considered a legitimate way of knowing referred to as performative inquiry (Bell, 1995; Pelias, 2018). During improvisation, or performative inquiry, one discovers information through sensing and feeling (Bell, 1995). Improvisation facilitates self-expression by first facilitating a sensual self-awareness.

Indeed, consider Vougioukalou et al.'s (2019) work with a group of refugees in Wales. The refugees improvised music, sang, and danced to integrate as a community. One woman became quite emotional during an improvised dance session. She realized, while dancing, how long it had been since she last felt that happy. This is the kind of information we can access through artistic improvisation, information outside of our awareness that appears as feelings. She later shared this self-discovery with the group (Vougioukalou et al., 2019).

Art facilitates self-expression by first facilitating self-awareness. Furthermore, art also facilitates empathic responses (Boske, 2020). Facilitators may ask participants to act out another person's lived experience to cultivate empathy (Pelias & Shaffer, 2007; Rohd, 1998; Sunwolf, 2006). Rohd (1998), for example, shares the story of a man who had been telling families to keep their kids away from Rohd's dialogues because they apparently encouraged kids to have premarital sex. One day, the man attended one of the dialogues. The group decided to include an "activating scene" about which the man had heard. In the scene, a 17-year-old girl comes home to tell her dad that she is pregnant and gets thrown out of the house. Participants talked about the process, warmed up, and then acted out the scene. As the facilitator, Rohd replaced the "daughter" two or three times with different audience members. Then the man stood up. He began talking loudly to the room saying that they were not dealing with the problem, the fact that the girl had sex. Rohd cut him off by saying that the man was not allowed to lecture the room since this was a dialogue. Rohd invited him to talk in the scene. The man walked to the stage and began yelling at his "daughter" (an audience participant) that she shouldn't have sex. He went on for almost a minute, paused, and then looked at her. She looked right at him and said, "Dad, I'm pregnant." He began lecturing at her again. "She took his hand and stopped him before he could start by saying 'Dad, I'm pregnant. I already had sex. It's too late for the speech.'" (Rohd, 1998, p. 138). The man paused, and "the daughter" started to cry. After a moment, he opened up his arms and held her. She continued crying, and he continued to hold her. The man returned to his seat and did not complain again about Rohd's facilitations. This story shows that performance, and acting in particular, can spark empathic responses.

As freeing as improvisation can be, any improvisation comes with the risk of exposing participants in vulnerable ways. Participants' improvisations can be deeply

emotional and meaningful (Gilboa et al., 2006; Wagner et al., 2016). Such knowledge will ideally set the stage for rich dialogue about lived experiences, spark intimacy, and nurture trust. Yet, it can also lead participants to highly uncomfortable moments, as they realize information that was outside of their awareness and potentially experience a paradigm shift in front of a group (Wagner et al., 2016).

For this reason, artistic improvisation must be introduced carefully (Faulkner, 2016). One way to ease the group into improvisation is by first facilitating warm up activities (Rohd, 1998). Another important element in improvisation is the facilitator's attitude toward others. Hospitality and acceptance are key in creating a receptive and welcoming space for improvisation (Vougioukalou et al., 2019). Performers need to feel encouraged to express themselves, be reassured that their emotions are welcomed, and know that they will not be judged. Total hospitality and reassurance are what facilitators often call the safe space.

Improvising Autobiographical Stories

Communicating through art, mostly acting, dance and drawing, facilitates imagination and self-expression. Another form of improvisation that can facilitate self-expression is storytelling. Storytelling has been honored across cultures and generations as a form of creating knowledge, and knowing together (Linabary et al., 2017). In more recent years, neuroscientists have discovered that a type of brain entrainment occurs during storytelling. The responses in the listeners' brains are coupled (correlated with a lag) to the responses in the speaker's brain in auditory areas, linguistic areas, and high-order areas (Stephens et al., 2010). Storytelling is impactful because a brain entrainment occurs between communicators. This brain entrainment leads to high degrees of comprehension, according to post-storytelling comprehension tests (Suzuki et al., 2018).

The dialogue design I created, and will present in the next section, invites people to improvise autobiographical stories. An autobiographical improvisation means to tell one's personal life experiences without previous rehearsal or preparation (Pelias, 2018). Autobiographical improvisations are subjective; the narrator focuses on the personal and remains self-reflexive (Fox, 2006). "It is a performance of the self for the self in a moment of self-reflexivity that has the potential to transform one's view of self in relation to the world" (Fox, 2006, p. 6). An autobiographical improvisation can be cathartic for the individual. It can also show an intimate side of that person to those who witness the story.

Listening to an autobiographical improvisation may change the listener's perception of the speaker, from a one-dimensional human to a multi-faceted human. Autobiographical improvisations can also make room for true selves to be in relation to one another and, potentially, cultivate trust. Yet, sharing an autobiographical improvisation can feel scary. There is a sense of risk as we show ourselves to others while our perspective may shift (Poulos, 2008). Yet, through autobiographical improvisations, we can enter I/Thou relations where we engage with the humanity of self and others.

Jennifer Linde, co-founder of the Storyscope Project,[1] sets the stage for storycircles by telling participants to not worry about telling "the right story" or being entertaining (Storyscope Project, n.d.). Storyscope facilitators insist to participants that they trust the story will reveal itself to them, and to trust whatever arises (Mark et al., 2021). Storyscope facilitators also encourage silence by telling participants not to respond to a person's story right away. Listeners sit with the story for about 30 seconds and then share their comments at the end of the storytelling round. The silence allows the story to sink in.

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[1] See https://storyscopeproject.com/ to learn more about the Storyscope Project.

Improvisation as a way of knowing also happens through "the empathic body" —

the recognition of another person's points of views and feelings (Pelias, 2018).

"Performative inquiry trusts the body as a site of knowing," self and others (p. 29). The

empathic body means to be present and learn about the other through the feelings that arise

during his performance. In short, the listeners of autobiographical improvisations engage in

performative inquiry by feeling whatever feeling arises as they witness another person's

performance.

Improvising Music

As discussed previously, facilitators use drawings, acting, and autobiographical

improvisations to facilitate a sensual self-awareness, self-expression, and the use of the

imagination. Improvisation is a form of discovering and sharing information about the self.

It is also a way to gain a sensual knowing of the other.

Yet, material that discusses the role of music and facilitation is largely absent—

except in the family music therapy field. Family therapists conduct musical therapy, from

now on called musical interventions, to help a family resolve relational issues. Organizations

and families, although not the same, can be conceptualized in similar ways. A family system,

just like an organizational collective, can be understood as a "living, breathing, ever-evolving

entity that are peopled and therefore capable of huge changes from moment to moment"

(Lord, 2012, p. 275). In fact, some managers learn family therapy techniques to be more

inclusive leaders (Barge, 2004). The field of family music therapy has provided explanations

as to the ways in which music-making contributes to dialogue. Below, I will describe how the

embodiment of music-making can contribute to dialogue by facilitating self-expression.

In musical interventions, the music becomes the data. People sometimes struggle to

articulate feelings or even use words to disguise feelings (Faulkner, 2016; Gilboa, 2006; Lord,

2012). Thus, therapists prefer to invite them to play music instead. They substitute questions like "how did that feel?" with "play how that felt." Participants describe knowing each other better simply by listening to each other's music (Lott, 2019).

One study found that, when an entire family played music at the same time, they created musical compositions that recreated the family system's dynamics (Nemesh, 2016). Each member could feel relational dynamics "easier and much faster" than they would have by using words to describe their relationships (Nemesh, 2016, p. 175). Interventions such as this are often followed by a conversation in which people reflect on what they learned from listening (Lott, 2019; Pavlicevic, 1999). This conversation resembles an I/Thou relation, a space to gain insights about self and others, but instead of exchanging words, people exchange music. Therapists argue that musical improvisations extend an individual's ability to listen and express herself (Nemesh, 2016; Pavlicevic, 1999). Participants comment that they find the sessions energizing, gained valuable insights, and had fun (Pavlicevic, 1999).

It is unsurprising that most of the research in the communication field would focus on words rather than music. Indeed, dialogue and OD meetings tend to be talk-centric. However, an alternative to communicating via words is communicating via music. Music-making is a form of communication and a form of play (Lord, 2012; Nemesh, 2016) that engages the body—arms, shoulders, abdomen (depending on the instrument at hand). This movement adds physical engagement and serves as an alternative to the being-still-for-the-entirety-of-the-dialogue model.

It is worth noting that musical interventions (Faulkner, 2016; Lord, 2012; Nemesh, 2016; Pavlicevic, 1999) ask participants to play some kind of percussion, such as a small drum like a djembe. This choice is convenient; a small percussion instrument is less

expensive and much easier to carry than a piano, for example. It is also easy to use. But another value is that playing percussion is relaxing. Humans have an innate sensitivity to rhythms as a result of hearing their mothers' rhythms in the womb (e.g., heartbeat, breathing), a sensitivity evidenced by physiological responses to music (Faulkner, 2016; Lord, 2012).

Research shows that percussion instruments can be relaxing and anxiety reducing (see Matney, 2017). Slow rhythms (80–100 beats per minute [bpm]) may increase theta wave production in the brain that leads to a sense of calmness and relaxation during the intervention (Faulkner, 2016; Pavlicevic, 1999). Furthermore, participants may experience a reduction of hypervigilant thoughts and even increased memory retention during musical interventions (Faulkner, 2016). It is unclear whether this is due to slow beats or because the rhythm distracts people from their own thoughts. Perhaps both. Research on the potential of music-making to relax (Lott, 2019) and interrupt hypervigilant thoughts (Faulkner, 2016) is relevant because it suggests that adding musical improvisation to a dialogue may facilitate ideal qualities of contact amongst people. A group of calm individuals who are (temporarily) not hypervigilant of their behaviors could lead to an honest and, as Buber would say, authentic exchange.

The Flow Technique

I saw this dissertation as an opportunity to design a dialogue that uses improvisation to set the conditions for trust and dialogic moments (i.e., moments of heartfelt connection). By engaging in improvisation, the dialogue might also invite new visions for the group. Specifically, I wanted participants to improvise music and stories.

This study makes use of a relatively new percussion instrument called the handpan. The handpan is 22 years old, and referred to by some as "the holy grail of sound therapy and

healing" (Saraz Handpan, 2019). There is little published research on the effects of the handpan in relaxation or verbal self-expression. Anecdotally, therapists and yoga teachers speak of the instrument's ability to relax, release stress, and place clients in a flow state due to its resonance (i.e., sound waves lingering for a long time) and full sound emanating in all directions (The Conscious Club, 2019).

Rob Jacoby, a licensed counselor in North Carolina, asks his clients to play the handpan during sessions to get them "out of their head" (Jacoby, 2020). He also describes that playing the handpan is a fun activity that takes the clients' pressure off the session. The handpan helps his clients release tension and nervousness.

It is worth noting that every single study on musical interventions cited above asked participants to play music *first* and talk only after they concluded playing. I wondered what would happen if participants told stories while *simultaneously* playing the handpan. Jacoby (2020) occasionally asks patients to speak while playing the handpan. He explains that doing so "gets people into their hearts." It also relaxes them while talking about something potentially stressful. This evidence suggests that playing percussion can reduce hypervigilant thoughts, and free self-expression (Faulkner, 2016).

In short, improvising a story and playing the handpan at the same time may be a powerful method of inquiry that brings raw self-expression and an opening for others to see unusual aspects of the self. This type of communication could potentially set the conditions for trust and dialogic moments. Thus, I created a dialogue design that incorporates what I call the "Flow Technique," that is, playing the handpan while simultaneously telling a story. I chose the name "Flow Technique" after my American nickname, "Flo."

The forthcoming study examines participants' experiences of a carefully crafted dialogue that incorporates the Flow Technique (i.e., playing the handpan and improvising a

story at the same time). I considered the OD and dialogue literature to craft the dialogue design, which I will present in the next section. The design positioned people to relate in a quality of contact inspired by the I/Thou relation and the person-centered approach to therapy.

As the dialogue designer, I aimed to curate a safe space where participants could trust the group with intimate parts of themselves. Such trust would make space for dialogic moments (Cissna & Anderson, 1994; Montague, 2012). If participants indeed felt trust during the dialogue, based on their claims and observable behaviors, their experience would become valuable empirical data on how trust is created. Understanding how trust is created advances our understanding for how to set the conditions for feel-good interactions, which is relevant to group flourishing. Hence, I offer the first research question:

RQ1. What did participants describe experiencing in and because of the Flow

Technique that promoted trust, dialogue, and/or dialogic moments, if anything?

As mentioned previously, my goal for the dialogue was also to set the conditions for dialogic moments. By doing so, this study became an opportunity to gather evidence that examines what dialogic moments look like in life as lived. This becomes especially relevant given the little empirical evidence gathered on dialogic moments within the dialogue field. To examine what a dialogic moment is, I offer the second research question:

RQ2a: In which moments, if any, did the listener feel a heartfelt connection with

another participant during the dialogue?

As I explained in Chapter 3, the dialogue field has written much about the quality of contact that facilitates heartfelt connection. It would be interesting to examine negative cases of connection to further advance our understanding of dialogue. Indeed, by exploring disconnection, the dialogue field could better understand the quality of contact that

facilitates disconnection between humans. I, therefore, offer the third research question to examine dialogic moments through a negative-case approach:

RQ2b: What did participants describe experiencing that made it more difficult for dialogic moments to emerge during the Flow Technique?

Finally, I wondered what relational outcomes were invited through music-making combined with storytelling. These outcomes can help us begin to understand the ways, if any, in which the Flow Technique could serve as a methodology for OD, and even organizational flourishing. Furthermore, it advances our understanding of the kind of outcomes that happen by fusing music-making, storytelling and dialogue that may not happen through talk-alone. Hence, I offer the last research question:

RQ3: What relational outcomes does the Flow Technique invite?

CHAPTER 5

METHODS

I approached this study from an interpretivist paradigm of reality, assuming that people may have different interpretations and experiences of the same scene. I aimed to understand each participant's subjective experience of the Flow Technique. I paid special attention to the thoughts and physical sensations participants experienced during the dialogue and immediately after. My experience and interpretations of the Flow Technique also informed the findings. I also aimed to make the dialogue a gift to my participants while gathering data for further scholarly reflection (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004). Sharing a performance in front of a team can be especially empowering by emphasizing the unique value of the participant's voice (Boske & Liedel, 2017; Singhall & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006).

Recruitment

Given my interest in crafting an experience that would support organizational development, I contacted four different collectives (i.e., small organizations for profit or nonprofit). I emailed the leaders of each collective asking for permission to recruit its members. The leaders knew me since I belonged to these collectives at the time of recruitment. The fact I belonged to the collectives facilitated access and recruitment. Yet, it also meant that the participants and I shared similar interests, including (but not limited to) play and human connection, which limited the findings and the generalizability of the study. Furthermore, participants probably liked me and were interested in maintaining a relationship with me, which may have constrained their sharing negative feedback[2].

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[2] These limitations are fully addressed in Chapter 9.

After receiving the leaders' permission, I sent email invitations to the members of the collective. The invitation was to join me in a meaningful conversation with fellow colleagues, where each individual would share different kinds of stories and play an instrument called the handpan. Recruitment also happened face to face during the collective's social gatherings. The criteria for participation were to be at least 18 years of age and belong to the collective in question (i.e., to consider themselves part of and be involved in the collective's activities). Recruitment happened from November 2021 - February 2022. The study received IRB approval in January 2022 (see Appendix).

Sample

Four collectives were involved in the study. The first collective was The Blue Square (pseudonym), a company that sells materials for transformation and self-growth. This company hosts workshops that attract loyal customers from all over the world. I facilitated two dialogues with a total of nine members of the Blue Square, who traveled to the US to attend a workshop. Some of these participants knew each other from previous workshops. Most of them didn't know one another. Most Blue Square participants were acquainted with me since we'd communicated via email or at a social gathering. The group ranged in age from 40 to 65 years old. Two members of this group were Americans, one was from South America, and the rest were from Western Europe (see Appendix for a list of participants' demographics).

The second collective was Research for Freedom (pseudonym). This research collaborative, made of doctoral students, is funded by a public university in the West of the United States. I facilitated two dialogues with a total of six members of Research for Freedom. The participants knew each other, and me. Most of them ranged in age from 25 - 35 years old, and were born in the United States.

The third collective was Research for Equity (pseudonym). This is another research collaborative, made up of doctoral students, funded by a public university in the West of the United States. I facilitated one dialogue with two members of Research for Equity. Given that two potential participants canceled at the last minute, I acted as a facilitator and participant for this specific dialogue. I was the third person in the dialogue. The participants knew each other, and myself. The group ranged in age from 25 - 40 years old.

The last collective is a yoga studio called Wild Yoga (pseudonym) located in the West of the United States. I facilitated one dialogue with three yoga teachers who earned their teaching certificate together. These teachers were friends, and had worked closely together. They were not well acquainted with me. The group ranged in age from 35 - 45 years old, and were all born in the USA.

By the end of the study, 20 participants experienced the Flow Technique (see Table 1). More than half the sample (i.e., 12 participants) were White, four were Black, two were Latino, one was Asian, and one was bi-racial. Thirteen participants were cisgender women, six were cisgender men, and one was gender-non-binary. Participant age ranged from 25 to 68. Five participants were in their 20s, five were in their 30s, four were in their 40s, three in their 50s, and three in their 60s. All participants signed a consent form at the beginning of the study (see Appendix), then received a $20 Amazon gift card after completing the study. Data collection occurred from March to April 2022.

Table 1

Number of Collectives, Participants, Dialogues, and Dialogue Length

Collective Pseudonym	Nature of the collective	Dialogues per collective	Participants per dialogue	Length of dialogue
The Blue Square	Transformation and self-growth	2	6	2:00:00
			3	1:05:00
Research for Freedom	Research collaborative	2	3	1:20:00
			3	1:30:00
Research for Equity	Research collaborative	1	2	1:45:00
Wild Yoga	Yoga studio	1	3	1:35:00
Total 4 collectives		6 dialogues	20 participants	9:15:00 hours

Description of Data

Below is a detailed description of the four types of data I collected to answer the research questions—dialogues, fieldwork, interviews, and drawings.

Dialogue

The dialogue design happened in collaboration with Michael Rohd and Joy Young. Michael is a social justice facilitator, and member of the dissertation committee. Joy is a storytelling circle facilitator who works at the Virgina G. Piper Center for Creative Writing at

ASU. I piloted the design twice with eight volunteers. The volunteers offered two rounds of feedback. Each round allowed me to further modify the dialogue so I could offer an enjoyable and enriching experience to participants.

Once data collection began, I facilitated, audio recorded, and transcribed a total of six dialogues. Each dialogue lasted on average 1 hour and 40 minutes. I facilitated 9 hours and 15 minutes worth of dialogue. This equates to 210 double-spaced pages of dialogue transcription. Below, I describe the main sections of the dialogue.

Purpose of the Meeting and Introduction to the Handpan

To begin, I asked each participant to share their name, pronouns, and favorite hobby. I then shared with participants that the purpose of the meeting was to play with a new form of communication in which people tell different kinds of stories while playing the handpan. The purpose was to explore what happens as people engage in this form of communication and discover if the interaction can set the conditions for connection. Then I introduced the handpan. A handpan is a round instrument made of steel, about 2.5 feet in diameter, and contains eight musical notes. It typically sits on participants' laps. Participants create music by gently tapping into a specific area of the handpan. I first explained how to play the handpan (e.g., what part of the finger to use, where to tap the handpan, and how strongly), then we moved to the warm up-games.

Figure 1

Handpan Photograph

Note: From SaskiaS [Photograph], 2020, Almay Stock Photo (https://www.alamy.com/close-up-of-hang-drum-hang-handpan-drum-musical-instrument-image388936010.html).

Warm-Up Games

Participants played three handpan games we invented for the purpose of the study. The games aimed to create rapport, a sense of play, and familiarity with the instrument. The games also aimed to introduce music-making carefully given the inevitable discomfort people feel when they play a foreign instrument, for the first time, in public (Faulkner, 2016).

I introduced the games by briefly teaching participants how to create sound on the handpan. To feel comfortable improvising music, participants must feel their improvisations will not be evaluated nor must they adhere to strict rules (Nemesh, 2016; Vougioukalou, et al., 2019). Therefore, I intentionally said "there is no wrong way to play the handpan,"

"please don't worry about creating beautiful music," and "I won't evaluate your music" to help ease the discomfort.

The games started with a low level of difficulty and then increased in difficulty. We spent approximately 30 minutes playing these games. By the end of the games, participants were engaging with the Flow Technique (i.e., playing the handpan while telling a story at the same time). Below, I'll describe each of the warm up games in detail.

Game 1. This game consisted of six rounds. The handpan stayed in the middle of the circle, and participants took turns playing it. Each participant played one note in round one, two notes in round two, three notes in round three, four notes in round four, until reaching six notes (round six). Participants had to get on their knees and move when it was their turn to play. They also had to keep track of how many notes they'd play so far.

Game 2. In this game, the handpan was passed around, always to the right. I first gave the handpan to Player 1. The person on Player 1's right (i..e, Player 2) said any verb or action (e.g., playing tennis). Player 1 played on the handpan what that specific verb feels like. The music matched the verb.

The person to the right (i.e., Player 3) of whoever said the verb (i.e., Player 2) interrupted the music with a new verb. Player 1 handed the handpan to the person on his right (Player 2). Then the person on the right (i.e., Player 1) of whoever said the latest verb (i.e., Player 3) interrupted the music with a new verb. Player 2 then hands the handpan to Player 3. Player 3 will eventually pass the handpan to Player 1, who will eventually pass to the handpan to Player 2, and so forth. I told the group that each player had a maximum of two minutes to interrupt the music with a new verb. The two-minute rule was suggested by two participants in order to make the game more dynamic.

44

Game 3. In this game, participants created a fictional story as a group. I asked one of the participants (i.e., Participant 1) to start us off by saying "one time…" and then invent a fictional plot. The challenge was to invent this story out loud while playing the handpan. The participant to the right (e.g., Participant 2) had a maximum of two minutes to interrupt the story, and carry on with the plotline. Participant 1 would then hand the handpan to Participant 2. Again, the handpan was always handed to the person to the right. Participant 3 had two minutes to interrupt Participant 2, who would then hand the handpan to Participant 3, and so forth. I asked participants to have fun with the story and make it as wild as they wanted.

The main purpose of these games was to familiarize participants with the handpan. The games helped each participant ease into the experience of playing and talking at the same time in front of the group. The games also served to 'break the ice,' and create rapport between dialogue participants.

Storytelling Prompts

Once participants finished playing the three games, I introduced certain guidelines to 'transform the games into a conversation.' I showed participants a big cardboard sign with six guidelines written down: be present, be honest, temporarily suspend all opinions, respect differences, accept others as they are, and keep the stories in the room. Facilitators often present these guidelines to create a safe space (Barge, 2017; Schwarz, 2002). These guidelines were borrowed from American facilitators with a Western approach to facilitation (Barge & Little, 2002; Barge, 2017; Glaser, 2016; Johannesen, 1971; Maoz & Ellis, 2006; Schwarz, 2002; Rohd, 1998). The last guideline, "stories stay here," was suggested by Joy Young to protect participants' stories from being divulged.

Imaginative Prompt. I passed around individual pieces of paper with the first prompt written down. Every participant received a piece of paper that contained the same prompt: "Imagine you were a part of your perfect version of [Collective's name]. So perfect it feels tailor made for you. What would one day in this perfect [collective] look like?"

On two occasions, I modified the wording of this prompt to adapt to participants' relationship. Alternative phrases included "Imagine you attended your perfect Blue Square get-together. What would a day in this perfect get-together look like?" and "Imagine you were creating a yoga studio together. What would one day in this perfect yoga studio look like?"

Participants created this story as a group. One person volunteered to start. Once the person finished describing their perfect day, they passed the handpan to the person to the right. This person had to repeat the gist of what the first person said, and weave their perfect day into the previous participant's perfect day, while also playing the handpan. Then the next person repeated the gist of what the previous two participants said, and weaved her story into theirs, and so on. Each person continued to weave the stories while playing the handpan at the same time.

The decision to make this storytelling round a memorization game was two folded. First, the instruction to memorize speech promotes engagement, since the person has to pay attention in order to repeat what they heard. Second, I wanted participants to have an awareness of the variety of stories within the system. This awareness opens the possibility for creativity and innovation (Oliver & Fitzgerald, 2013). Lastly, I wanted participants to practice weaving together everyone's stories into a master story. This weaving can make the system more innovative, inclusive, and welcoming (Oliver & Fitzgerald, 2013). Depending on the time, this round of storytelling may have ended with a conversation regarding the

themes of the story, or a brief conversation about the experience before moving on to the next prompt.

      Autobiographical Prompts. The next prompts invited participants to share a true story. I reminded participants that they could refrain from sharing at any point by saying "pass." Before passing around the second prompt, I explained how to tell a story. This explanation was passed on to me, through personal communication, by storytelling facilitator, poet, and spoken word performer Joy Young, who works at ASU's Virginia Piper Center for Creative Writing. Joy and I met twice via Zoom to discuss my dialogue design, and they provided advice. Based on Joy's advice, I asked participants to first think of any specific instance that comes to mind after hearing the prompts described in the next paragraphs. The intention behind asking participants to narrow their story down to a specific instance is to make the telling of the story easy. I also told participants that the instance could be "small," meaning, it didn't have to be life changing or profound. I asked participants to please not overthink their choice of story, and rather trust the first instance that comes to them (Mark et al., 2021). To transform this instance into a story, I invited participants to do three things.

      First, start your story with the phrase "one time…" Two, try to provide details such as names and locations. Three, try to organize the story in the following way: What was your world like? What happened? How is your world different now? Why does that matter to you? Although this structure goes against the idea that improvisation should be structure-free (Nemesh, 2016; Vougioukalou, et al., 2019), it intended to aid participants tell their stories in a similar way.

      I passed around pieces of paper with the first autobiographical prompt written down: "Can you tell me about a recent time you felt particularly seen?" I opened this round by

sharing a personal story about a time I felt particularly seen. Joy recommended I open the

round with a demonstration, something they do when they facilitate. The demonstration

showed participants what a story looks like. It was also a way to practice a horizontal

approach to facilitation where I embody the kind of courage and transparency I'm inviting

participants to embody. Some participants mentioned they appreciated my willingness to

share personal information and not just gather personal information from them. In one of

the dialogues, I shared a time when I didn't feel seen. However, I returned to sharing stories

of feeling seen since the mood of my "unseen" story and my participants' "seen" stories was

too contrasting.

I invited participants to honor every story, once the storyteller was done, by

clapping, snapping their fingers, or whatever felt best to them. The instruction set the

conditions for acceptance, validation, and reassurance. Validation is core, if not

indispensable, for the wellbeing and development of any human, and therefore a social

system (Corey, 2015; Rimé, 2007; Van der Kolk, 2014). Validation and reassurance are also

considered necessary for dialogue to occur (Buber, 1965; Montague, 2012).

I asked participants to please not interrupt the stories. The speaker had time to

explore their own story while the rest listened. The group discussed the commonalities

across the stories once the round ended.

I finally passed the last prompt: "Can you tell me about a recent time you felt excited

about the work you are doing?" Each participant told their story while playing the handpan.

The group then discussed the commonalities across the stories.

There were several motivations for inviting autobiographical stories. The first was to

make space for an autobiographical improvisation—a performance "of the self, for the self,

in a moment of self-reflexivity that has the potential to transform one's view of self in relation to the world" (Fox, 2006, p. 6). An autobiographical improvisation can be cathartic.

The prompts, especially the 'time you felt seen' prompt, invites participants to share a story they typically wouldn't share, and may lose control of their feelings. The idea of losing control over one's emotions, what some call vulnerability, is especially difficult for members of cultures taught to be tough, and not perform emotion (Durón Delfín & Leach, 2021; Jordan, 2008a). Yet "...dialogue exists at the borders of human agency where control of the situation is relinquished and relational plans merge into the unexpected" (Montague, 2012, p. 413). The courage to reveal parts of ourselves we typically do not disclose, and potentially show our deepest feelings, makes space for moments of deep and special connection (Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2018). The autobiographical rounds intended to make space for dialogic moments.

Finally, autobiographical stories make space for what brown (2021) calls "true" or "authentic" selves—the parts of self that are typically not shown—to be in relation to one another. The interaction of "authentic" selves is a goal of facilitation (brown, 2021) and an important step in the cultivation of trust, intimacy, and belonging (Laurenceau et al., 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1988).

Closure

I asked participants what was on their mind once the storytelling rounds concluded. Each person described bits and pieces of their experience. Finally, I asked each person to leave the rest of us with one word that summarized their experience. This marked the end of the dialogue. Participants stood up, thanked me, and engaged in conversation with each other. I packed my gear and made mental notes of the post-dialogue interactions that were happening in the room. These observations made their way into my fieldwork.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is a method where the researcher places her body on the scene to share firsthand the environment, language, and relations of the studied group (Tracy, 2020). My role as a researcher was that of a complete participant for I belonged to these collectives, and I was the dialogue's facilitator.

During the dialogue, I jotted down my observations of the scene. I was mindful of writing few and quick notes to avoid distraction. I paid special attention to nonverbal cues (e.g., smiles, eye contact), non-verbal interruptions, and how I felt in the space. A black feminist approach to facilitation absolutely encourages feeling/sensing as a valid way to know what is happening in the room, and between participants (brown, 2021). As a researcher, one's feelings of the scene can be data regarding the scene (Tracy, 2020). The awareness of my feelings serves as an intuitive understanding of the group at hand, and keeps me self-reflective of how such feelings are undoubtedly informing my perception of the scene. Lastly, I took notes of who stayed in the room to interact once the dialogue ended, and who didn't.

I translated my raw notes into formal field notes within 48 hours of the dialogue, most of them within 24 hours (Tracy, 2020). I wrote the field notes before talking to anyone else about the dialogue to preserve my raw perception of the scene, un-influenced by anyone. In these field notes, I bracketed out my interpretations of the scene in order to better "see" the facts of the scene. Aside from the time spent facilitating, I spent an extra 1h35 minutes setting up the space, welcoming participants, and talking to them afterwards. The total time spent on the field was 10h50 minutes (which included the dialogues). I wrote 29 double spaced typewritten pages of field notes.

As mentioned previously, I acted as a facilitator and a participant in one of the dialogues. The event gave me the opportunity to experience the Flow Technique as a player. My experience of the dialogue from a player's point of view will make its way to the findings section.

Interviews

I conducted 19 individual semi-structured interviews. One participant dropped out of the study in the midst of data collection. Thirteen of those interviews happened within two days of the dialogue. Four interviews occurred a week after the dialogue. Two occurred three weeks after the dialogue. This timing allowed me to capture participants' memories and experiences as vividly as possible. Those "fresh memories" contribute to the interviews providing, not just accurate, but rich and nuanced details pertaining participants' lived experience.

The majority of the interviews (i.e., 13) happened via Zoom while six happened face to face. The interviews ranged from 48 minutes to 1 hour and 25 minutes. The mean interview length was 1 hour and 4 minutes. I collected a total of 16.5 hours' worth of interviews. This resulted in 637 double-spaced pages worth of typewritten transcriptions.

I conducted the interviews after writing my field notes. This choice allowed me to write the scene before my impressions of the scene were shaped by my participants' interviews. This choice also allowed me to revisit my field notes before the interview and ask my participants about specific behaviors that happened during the dialogue.

I prepared a list of 19 interview questions to stimulate conversation (see Appendix for the Interview Guide). Some questions were improvised on the spot and varied depending on the participant, which kept the content flexible. I maintained an interview stance of naïveté where I dropped presuppositions and judgments, while maintaining an openness to

unexpected findings (Tracy, 2020). Participants spoke primarily of and for themselves. I was their "travel companion in the exploration of experience" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 102).

The first part of the interview explored their experience telling a story while playing the handpan (e.g., Please remember an instance when you were telling a story while playing the handpan. What was that experience like?). The second part explored their experience listening to stories and music (e.g., Please remember a specific instance when you were listening to another person's story and music. What was that experience like?). The third part explored moments of connection (e.g., Did you experience a strong, obvious, special, heartfelt connection with any of the other participants at any point? If so, when did these moments happen?). Poulos (2008) describes dialogic moments as "moments when it becomes clear that a strong, heartfelt connection is made between humans" (p. 117). He also describes it as moments that are special and deeper than usual. Barge (2017) describes dialogic moments as a "special moment within conversation and has a distinct interactive logic and quality" (p. 4). Both descriptions, and especially Poulos's (2008) description of how connection is felt (i.e., strong, heartfelt, and deep) informed the initial wording of the question. The phrasing of the question evolved as the study went on, something I will discuss in the discussion section.

The fourth part of the interview explored participants' sense-making of the dialogue (e.g., What do you think playing and telling stories do for the group, if anything? What are some things you learned about yourself because of the activity, if anything?). Lastly, I asked if they would use the Flow Technique in the future if they were the leader of the collective, and if so, for what purpose (see Appendix).

Drawings

Two interview questions prompted participants to draw a visual metaphor of the Flow Technique (e.g., If you were comparing the experience of playing the handpan while telling your story to something that other people are more familiar with, what would you compare it to?). Participants drew the answer and then talked about their drawings. I collected a total of 38 drawings.

There were several reasons to prompt participants to make drawings. People use a different part of their brains when drawing compared to speaking (Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2015). Drawing and then talking about a drawing engages participants in different types of thinking that leads to analytic insight with unique empirical value. In fact, art-based data commonly surprises the researcher with insights they did not expect (Novak, 2010; Singhall & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2015).

Second, disciplines are diminished when only one way of knowing is privileged (Singhall & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006). Scholars are therefore calling for alternative ways of generating knowledge, including art-based approaches. Art-based data is an alternative to textocentrism—the privilege of text, writing, and words as a mode of comprehension – making art an accessible form of knowledge production across populations that may experience difficulty articulating ideas, for example, people that don't speak English as their first language (Singhall & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006).

Data Analysis

The website Otter.ai transcribed each audio. I later listened to each audio interview while reading its transcription to correct errors. I also re-read the field notes and reviewed the participants' drawings twice.

After I was familiar with the entire body of data, I employed a phronetic-iterative approach to data analysis (Tracy, 2020). The phronetic-iterative approach involves an abductive process of thinking, where the researcher goes back and forth between data and literature to make sense of the data. My objective was to enter as far as possible into the world of my participants, withholding expectations of the findings, yet being able to connect the emerging findings to past literature. The process of going back and forth between data and the literature is part of the phronetic-iterative approach.

The analysis began by first coding line by line two interviews, one set of field notes, and one dialogue transcription (i.e., 25% of the data). Line by line coding means I attributed a code to most of the sentences in that portion of data. A code is a word that assigns an essence-capturing attribute for later purposes of pattern detection (Saldaña, 2016). Each code answered the question "What is this expression an example of?" (Tracy, 2020). The rest of the data (i.e., 75%) were not coded line by line. Instead, I assigned portions of data that fit a pre-established code to such code. I used the software NVivo to assist me in the coding process.

The first iteration of the codebook contained 280+ codes. I progressed next by excluding the codes that did not relate to the research questions. Furthermore, I began grouping overlapping codes into categories. From this process, a second iteration of the codebook with 33 codes emerged.

At this point, I began reading academic articles that helped explain the emerging topics. I continued narrowing down the codebook to focus on the codes that contributed something new to the literature and were the most interesting.

The research questions for this study emerged iteratively (Creswell, 2007; Suddaby, 2006; Tracy, 2020). In collaboration with my committee, and my advisor in particular, we

modified the research questions several times. The wording of the questions evolved depending on the codes I focused on. The act of adapting the research questions so they may effectively answer the codes at hand adds truthfulness, and rigor (Tracy, 2010).

As the research questions evolved, I created a third iteration of the codebook that contained first and second level codes. First level codes are names that I created to describe the emerging patterns (e.g., "mental noise", "presence"). Second level codes are scholarly terms that describe the emerging patterns (e.g., "play," "invitational reflexivity"). Furthermore, I continued to exclude the codes that did not answer the new research questions.

A fourth and final iteration of the codebook emerged. The final codebook contains 11 first and second level codes (refer to Appendix to see the Codebook). These codes serve three purposes: (a) they reflect the patterns that emerged from the data; (2) they meaningfully answer the new research questions, and (3) they advance our notion of dialogue. I will present the codes, with their subcodes, in the findings chapters. The final research questions aim to effectively answer the codes at hand.

Rigor

I engaged in several strategies to ensure qualitative rigor. The interviews and dialogue were piloted twice before data collection began. I continued adding small improvements to the dialogue design during data collection, based on participants' input. Specifically, I explained what part of the finger to use when playing the handpan. I also instructed participants to interrupt someone's music within two minutes of them playing—a suggestion made by two participants.

The study's sample features a diversity of voices, since participants' professions, nationalities, backgrounds and age were mixed (the youngest being 25 and the oldest 68).

This diversity across participants hopefully captured a multiplicity of experiences and opinions (Tracy, 2010).

I cannot emphasize enough the thoughtfulness that went into caring for participants by engaging in ethical practices. The consent form emphasized twice, in bold letters, that participants can opt-out of the study at any time without consequences. The purpose of the dialogue—to share different kinds of stories and *set the conditions* for connection—was framed to maintain a non-forceful relationship. One of my committee members was particularly interested in changing the wording from "we are creating trust" (i.e., potentially forceful language) to "we are setting the conditions for trust," meaning that connection is a possibility but not an order. Throughout the dialogue, I reminded participants that they could opt out from sharing a story by saying "pass." Interestingly, none of them chose to pass. Participants were also asked in the consent form to not share the stories with anyone outside the room, something I reminded them again during the dialogue to respect confidentiality.

Hospitality and acceptance are key in creating a receptive space for improvisations (Vougioukalou et al., 2019). Performers need to feel welcomed, encouraged to express themselves, and know that they will not be judged. I did my best to embody acceptance and non-judgment. I made eye contact with each person after their story, clapped, said thank you, provided tissues, and offered a gentle physical touch to those who cried. I was present with everyone's story.

These stories required transparency and courage–values easier said than done. When people start feeling fear, they stop breathing (Gumbs, 2021). Therefore, the facilitator's "primary responsibility" is "to keep people breathing" during the dialogue, especially in the face of their fears (e.g., speaking in front of the group, or showing emotion) (Gumbs, 2021,

p. 40). Thus, I reminded participants several times to breathe, especially throughout the autobiographical storytelling rounds.

I also engaged in other best practices for field notes, interviews, and metaphor analysis. The field notes were written within 48 hours to capture as many details as possible. I paid special attention to non-verbals, since those were not captured in the audio recordings. I wrote a thick description of the scene (to the best of my abilities) yet avoiding an abundance of writing that would later overwhelm me (Tracy, 2020).

I used seven different types of interview questions, using Tracy's (2020) recommendations as a guide, to prompt a range of answers. The questions explore participants' internal world, which I could not observe through mere observation. The ordering of the questions was designed to first create rapport and then move to tougher questions. I practiced Ellingson's (2017) recommended interview practices, such as responding to the interviewee's body language and facial expressions, reflecting back their answers, using soft tones to help them relax, and allowing long silences so the interviewee can reflect or add additional information.

Best practices for drawing and metaphor analysis include asking participants to explain the meaning of each element of the drawing, and the location of the participant within the drawing. During data collection, I wrote analytic memos—conversations with myself about the data (Saldaña, 2016; Tracy, 2020). The writing of these memos kept me aware of my interpretations of the scene.

The fact that this study collected four different types of data increases its credibility via crystallization (Ellingson, 2009). Crystallization utilizes different ways of knowing across

multiple points of the qualitative continuum.[3] Crystallized studies typically use at least one middle ground approach (i.e., constructivist or post positivist) and one artistic or performative approach. This study collected, within the qualitative continuum, artistic/performative approaches (i.e., drawings, storytelling, and music) and middle ground approaches to qualitative research (i.e., semi structured interviews, participant observation, thematic analysis, and participatory action research). In short, the researcher uses more than one way of knowing to understand the phenomenon at hand, and looks at it from different angles (similar to looking at the different sides of a prism).

The findings chapters contain two slightly different writing styles. I mainly wrote the chapters as a research report that explains the codes. I also incorporated my own voice that accounts for my subjective experience of the dialogue. The interweaving of more than one genre of writing is part of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009).

This study used different ways of knowing, within the qualitative spectrum, but it also drew from different literature within the communication field (i.e., organizational development, dialogue, and performance) and across disciplines (i.e., counseling, family music therapy, and creative facilitation). I think this diversity of literature broadens our understanding of the phenomenon at hand, and in a way, "crystallized" the literature review.

The last component of a crystallized text, and any qualitative study done with rigor, is providing a thick description (Ellingson, 2009; Geertz, 1973; Tracy, 2010). In the findings section, I aim to show the scene in a way that captures multiple participants' voices and experiences. The text will be rich in detail in the hope that the readers may come to their

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[3] Qualitative methods range in a continuum. The paradigm of reality one chooses influences the method selection. You may select methods between an artistic / impressionistic paradigm, and a science / realist paradigm. Middle ground approaches refer to research methods approached from a social constructivist paradigm—between art and science.

own conclusions of the Flow Technique. The multiple experiences, or voices, at times contradict each other. "Qualitative researchers do not put words in members' mouths, but rather attend to viewpoints that diverge with those of the majority or with the author" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). This study practices multivocality by contrasting different voices, including those opinions different from my own.

To capture multivocality, I engaged in member reflection by talking about the findings with my participants (Tracy, 2010). Two research participants read the second iteration of the codebook. They clarified whether the codes matched their experiences, and added additional information. This consulting added clarity to the final codebook and the findings section.

I'm using pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality. I intentionally switched pseudonyms throughout the chapters to prevent deductive disclosure (i.e., the ability to identify the participant based on deduction). I removed pseudonyms from some sections, as well as the collectives' pseudonyms, to further prevent deductive disclosure.

The chapters that you will find below were co-constructed with my participants. I provide a thick description, using exemplars and quotes, so that you, the reader, may enter the world of those who experienced the Flow Technique, and come to your own conclusions.

CHAPTER 6

LESSONS ON TRUST

This chapter presents findings related to the first research question: "What did participants describe experiencing in and because of the Flow Technique that promoted trust, dialogue, and/or dialogic moments, if anything?" Let us remember that "trust is what gives life to dialogic potential" (Montague, 2012, p. 409). Those who engage in dialogue need to feel safe showing parts of themselves they don't typically reveal—to know that they will not be judged but rather welcomed as they are. If dialogic moments occurred, then we can assume participants felt they could trust the group.

Indeed, the data suggests that trust was accomplished. I make this claim based both on participants' claims during interviews, and their behavior during the dialogue--as I noted in the dialogue transcriptions, and my field notes.

Participants told vulnerable stories, and showed a sensitive side. "It felt very safe, very open. We could feel," said Kat. She went on: "I was so moved by re-living the story by telling it, the beauty of it, that I started to cry. . . . As I'm telling the story, I'm realizing I'm sort of, for the first time, processing the feeling of what happened."

I quickly learned to bring tissues to each session. The sweetness of "feeling seen" was often accompanied by stories of struggle. "There was definitely a moment where I just remember pausing. I stopped hitting the notes because it was like, 'That was a hard thing to share…. I told some thoughts that I hadn't even shared with my partner," explained Tess. People cried. Eyes teared up. Voices cracked. Even my voice cracked more than once as I told my stories.

An especially powerful moment was Emilia's story of being seen. Her story was about hearing positive comments from her colleagues after going through a rough time in

60

her life. She stopped speaking when she described the rough time in her life. There was a long pause. No words, but her hands kept moving. Slowly, her eyes teared up. Her cheeks went red, and tears began rolling down. Lea and Ella watched her cry. No one said a word. No one moved. The only sound was the sound of the handpan and Emilia's emoting.

Emilia took a pause while she silently cried. She then took a deep breath and continued with her story. When she finished, the group exploded with a round of applause. "I don't even need a therapist," said Emilia, laughing, once the storytelling round ended. By this, Emilia suggests that she expressed deep feelings, and felt a sense of relief.

Similar to Emilia, most participants shared deep feelings from meaningful moments in their lives. In the excerpt below, Lea explained that Emilia's story felt uncensored:

It was raw. It wasn't rehearsed. It wasn't something that we all had prepared or stood in the mirror and figured out how we were going to put words together. When Emilia told her story about feeling seen, it really resonated with me. It felt like "okay, we're really talking about things that have some substance. This isn't surface." Because a lot of times we censor ourselves. That felt so uncensored. I know Emilia felt safe. It felt like a safe space.

Lea's testimony provides further evidence that the group felt trust, evidenced by the "raw" and "not-surface level" information shared in what "felt like a safe space." Julia compared the Flow Technique to telling stories around a campfire at night—a metaphor also used by three other participants. A campfire is warm, a space of safety compared to the wild and dark surrounding. It's also a special moment that doesn't happen every day. For Julia, a campfire symbolizes connection and trust (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Julia's Metaphor of Speaking While Playing the Handpan: Campfire at Night

She explained: "It [the Flow Technique] really brings people together. It connects them. And then it also creates a room of trust. . . . The space allows people to open up. Because even the fire, you know? It's the warmth." Julia's testimony provides further evidence that participants were feeling trustful. It also suggests that the Flow Technique 'opens people up'—a claim I will continue to unpack throughout the findings chapters.

Zoe was especially moved by the fact that the group shared their stories in her presence. This was her first time going to a Blue Square (i.e., the collective) gathering and meeting the dialogue participants. "They were willing to share a story and, you know, some of them were pretty personal. Tears were coming in their eyes. So that was pretty special that they trusted the group, and me included."

The fact that deep emotions and vulnerable stories were present means that the group was feeling trustful; otherwise, they wouldn't have disclosed this information (Herbette & Rimé, 2004). If they'd been feeling fearful or noticed unresponsiveness from the group, they would have likely censored themselves (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Glaser, 2016;

Kaner, 2014). I am not particularly surprised that participants felt trust and engaged in a dialogue, since we carefully designed a meeting that set the conditions for connection.

It was surprising, though, to hear the nuances of their experiences as they played the handpan and listened to others' stories/music. Their experiences teach us lessons on how trust is created. The findings in this chapter offer empirical evidence to suggest that experiencing relaxation is an important component of feeling trust and engaging in dialogue.

Relaxation

This section explores participants' experiences of relaxation in and because of the Flow Technique. The theme of relaxation was one of the most popular, with 61 mentions across the data. Participants expressed that it was calming to communicate with the handpan or listen to others' communication with this device. Six participants drew sketches of the ocean, or a stream, when I asked them to compare the Flow Technique to another experience people could understand.

The dialogue reminded Ana of both sitting by the ocean with friends and telling stories around a campfire (see Figure 3). She then transitioned to comparing the Flow Technique to being on a boat. "When you're in the middle of the sea in a boat, there's a gentle rocking because of the waves. So, it was like that. The handpan was more like, 'oh, this is rocking me,'" she explained.

Figure 3

Ana's Metaphor of Speaking While Playing the Handpan: Campfire by the Beach

Ana clarified that the rocking sensation was "relaxing, and soothing. It was like 'oh, yeah, I don't have to be anywhere else. I can just be here listening to the story.' It didn't produce a sense of urgency or need to be somewhere else." By this, Ana suggests that the sound of the handpan eliminated the feeling of rush. Ana's testimony provides evidence that, through the use of the handpan, the Flow Technique calms people.

Kat, who compared the Flow Technique to fishing, explained:

> What I tried to convey was doing something that brings you calm, peace, something that relaxes you.…It was just a very relaxing experience. The contrary to what you would expect of being with a group of people you don't know, sharing something deep.

In the above excerpt, Kat pointed out that the relaxation was unexpected given the nature of the activity. Kat's testimony is relevant because it shows that the Flow Technique can calm people down even in the face of something as scary as sharing vulnerable feelings in public.

Participants' mentions of water suggest a deep relaxation. For instance, observing and listening to water increases alpha brain waves (Ulrich, 1981). A brain wave represents the electrical activity of neurons, specifically the voltage fluctuation within neurons in the brain (Desai et al., 2015). Alpha waves occur when an individual is alert yet in a state of rest. Alpha waves are associated with calmness and cognitive performance, including the speed at which words and memories are retrieved (Desai et al., 2015).

Memory Retrieval

Interestingly, three participants mentioned that memories came instantly and easily while they simultaneously played and spoke. It was easy to "find words to deeper feelings and emotions" as Emilia described. Kit and Ana were particularly surprised by how specific details within a memory emerged. Kit shared how surprised she was that she could remember the content of a specific letter:

> My partner knows . . . but I never really talked about it. I never told anyone about it. . . . I was so amazed that it [the information] came to me so easily. I was like, "That is insane." I have the worst memory. . . . I was pretty amazed.

The fact that Daniela has "the worst memory" and yet articulated word-by-word the content of a letter she received years ago suggests she was potentially in an alpha brain wave state. In other words, relaxed.

De-Stressing

Listening to water for 10 minutes can also decrease salivary cortisol (Thoma et al., 2018). The sound of a water fountain alone can aid the sympathetic nervous system in recovering faster from a stressor and contribute a soothing effect (Alvarsson et al., 2010). Those who compared the Flow Technique to listening to water may have experienced, not only alpha brain waves, but also a decrease of cortisol. Kit, for example, explained she left

the dialogue able to take deep breaths. "I have a hard time sometimes taking a deep breath. I felt like I was able to take a deep breath and fully breathe," she responded when I asked how she felt physically after the dialogue. The fact that Kit struggled to take deep breaths and left the dialogue able to take full breaths speaks to how effective the technique can be in relaxing people, even if they are being vulnerable in front of a group.

Three people compared the dialogue to yoga. "I feel like I've done yoga," said Luke at the end of our dialogue. "That feeling of having done yoga feels like what we just did." Ella, a yoga teacher, agreed: "It just feels like a meditation class or a yoga class where the purpose is relaxing and bringing yourself awareness."

This comparison is important because it provides further evidence that the Flow Technique may be changing some physiological markers. Yoga, like water, can change a brain's electrical activity to an alpha wave state. At least four studies show that alpha waves increase after a 30-minute yoga practice, especially during practices that bring awareness to the breath (Desai et al., 2015). Participants' electrical brain activity was calmer, and subjects felt less anxious after a yoga class (Desai et al., 2015). Similar to the feeling of ending a yoga class, participants reported feeling calm once the dialogue ended. When I asked participants to leave us with one word to close the dialogue, it was common to hear words that revolved around relaxation, for example, comfort, peace, rejuvenation, rest, and ease.

Music, both listening to and making it, contributes to participants' relaxation. Slow music can change brain waves to a calmer state (Faulkner, 2016). In their meta-analysis of 9,617 participants, de Witte et al. (2020) found a small to medium effect of music interventions on physiological stress markers, especially cortisol levels, heart rate, and blood pressure. They also found a medium to large effect of musical interventions on psychological stress markers, such as reduced anxiety, nervousness, restlessness, and feelings of worry.

66

Interestingly, when the body relaxes—for example, cortisol levels decrease and feelings of worry dissipate—it allows oxytocin to be produced (Zak, 2013). In the communication/biology literature, oxytocin is associated with trusting behaviors. When humans engage in prosocial and trusting behaviors—for example, a couple who cuddles and communicates mutual appreciation after sex (Denes, 2012; Denes et al., 2017)—research has found high oxytocin and low cortisol levels in those behaviors. Zak (2013) puts it this way: we are either feeling calmed (oxytocin can surge) or worried (oxytocin shuts down). This is important to the study at hand because it suggests that, in a calmed state, participants' bodies were more likely to produce oxytocin—a molecule that appears in trusting communicative behaviors, such as self-disclosure (Lane et al., 2013).

Indeed, the calming effect of oxytocin facilitates the willingness to share event-related emotions (Lane et al., 2013). This is important to the study because, if participants indeed experienced an oxytocin rise, that rise would help explain why they felt enough trust to communicate "raw" and "uncensored" information about themselves.

Consider Kit's experience of my and Tess's stories. Both Tess and I, separately and privately, had told Kit the same stories we shared during the dialogue prior to the event. Yet, Kit had a different experience of our stories when we narrated them in the dialogue.

> There was so much more depth and detail. She (Tess) tells us stories, or she'll tell us things that are going on. But it's very much like "well, this happened."…But the story that she gave [in the dialogue] and the amount of…there was so much more depth to it and detail. I just felt more.

If Tess was feeling relaxed enough that she experienced an oxytocin rise, which research suggests is possible, the rise would help explain why Tess shared "much more depth and detail" in the second iteration of her story.

Kit had a similar impression of my story. She described my first iteration that I had told her outside of the study as "very short and condensed." She went on:

> The second time you shared it, I keep coming back to this word: "resonate." I felt it more. You did provide more depth to the story; it had more detail. . . . I'm taking deep breaths because, in that moment, it was kind of something that you needed to take a deep breath for.

Like Tess, I may have felt so deeply relaxed that an oxytocin rise occurred. This hypothetical rise of oxytocin, as a result of relaxation, is relevant to the field of dialogue since people's disclosures facilitates dialogic moments. Deep relaxation then is an important facilitator of dialogue.

Besides sharing event-related emotions as a result of relaxation, some participants also slowed down their pace. The challenge of speaking and playing at the same time forces people to slow down. Ana mentioned her change of pace during the dialogue: "When I'm playing the handpan, I think it allows me to…because I rush when I speak, like storytelling. So, it allows you to pace yourself and be led by your emotions." Ana suggests that the Flow Technique is slowing down her speech. It is common to speak fast when we feel nervous. By calming the mind and relaxing the body, it makes sense that the Flow Technique helped people slow down their speech. "It made me feel very calm, very collected. Definitely at peace," said Alec as they reflected on the experience of telling a story while playing the handpan.

Kit felt so relaxed that she compared her dialogue experience to that of receiving a facial (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Kit's Metaphor of Speaking While Playing the Handpan: Receiving a Facial
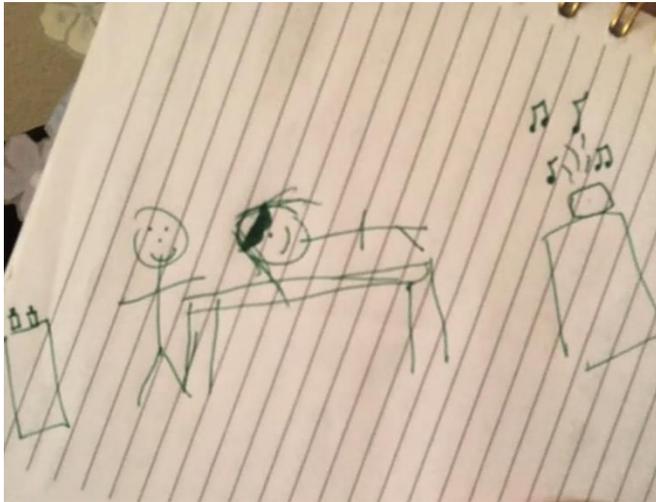
The music really resonated. So, in one corner, . . . there's a music box. There's like

music notes coming out of it. I'm laying on the table where I was getting my facial. I

don't know what she was using to put on my face, but I don't really care. It was just

the most relaxing and soothing experience. Telling the story with the handpan kind

of put me back into that particular moment of feeling more relaxed than I had ever

felt.

What we see in the above excerpt is more evidence that participants were feeling

deeply relaxed in and because of the Flow Technique. I want to bring the reader's attention

to the musical notes in Kit's drawing, and the line "the music really resonated." Kit's

testimony suggests that the handpan is contributing to the sense of relaxation.

I noticed participants were relaxing because of their body language. Several people

laid back. Many took off their shoes. One of them even laid down. I don't think participants

would have experienced the same relaxation if they had to play a guitar or a violin. In fact,

five participants googled handpan prices after the dialogue, and one actually purchased one.

In short, the Flow Technique helped to facilitate participants' trusting disclosures and a state of relaxation. The music was not the only component that promoted relaxation. There are two additional experiences that facilitated relaxation—play and presence. Below, I will describe in detail what play and presence looked like during the dialogues.

Play

Play can be conceptualized as a series of interconnected emotional experiences (Eberle, 2014). The heart of play—what it promises at its most basic level—is fun (Eberle, 2014). Fourteen participants described the dialogue as fun. Participants joked, made funny voices, said silly comments, and laughed out loud during the dialogue. I saw smiles throughout the approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes we were together. When I asked Lea what the dialogue did for her, if anything, she replied, "it allowed me to have fun and play." Several participants confessed they rarely play anymore.

Some participants claimed that play began the first time they tapped the handpan. I felt a sense of play arise during game two. Game two consisted of playing what a verb feels like (e.g., swimming). Each person had up to two minutes to interrupt with a new verb for the next person to play. I even wrote in my field notes, "I am LOVING this game. I want to do this when I'm alone in my room." Participants' suggestions to have a time limit—two minutes to interrupt—makes the game more fun because it gives everyone more time to play. "My favorite exercise was the second one," said Emilia. "I felt like 'oh, we're all playing this game, and we got to make it work together.'"

Then we moved to game three, the wild fictional story they created as a group. "By the time the last person completed the story, the story was completely confusing, wrong, whatever," said Phillip, age 65, while he laughed remembering his group's story. Here is an

excerpt from one of the stories in which a school bus goes to space, comes back, and one of the kids inside is hungry:

> Alec: This poor kid, no food, no nothing, maybe he walked into the wrong house. . . And then all the sudden he sees a dog.

> Luke: He sees this dog. He thinks, "my Lord, I'm hungry." [laughter] He has a moment where he thinks to himself, "should I eat this dog? What would I feel if I killed a dog? It looks so cute."

> Rachel: Sadly, the dog can talk [laughter]. The dog spoke, and the boy was amazed, thinking, "Why can this dog speak? [laughter] Since when do dogs talk?"

In this excerpt, we see participants joking through the exchange of nonsensical ideas. They are showing a sense of humor. Humor is a form of play, namely, the play with ideas (Proyer, 2018). Humor refers to joking, entertaining, or any predisposition to frame a situation in such a way that provides oneself (and perhaps others) with amusement and avoidance of "serious tension" (Proyer, 2018, p. 263). In fact, an impediment to play is becoming terminally serious as we become adults (Proyer, 2018). The release of tension, through humor, opened up the space for more fun.

Play owes its "playfulness" to neoteny: the retention or even expansion of juvenile traits in adults (Gilead, 2020). Those who persist in displaying juvenile traits, including curiosity, apparently develop a more complex repertoire of behaviors and perceptions. That is one of the reasons humans benefit from a much longer childhood than other species (Panksepp, 1998). This biological delay in maturation gives the brain continuing flexibility. It is not surprising, then, that play can appear during childlike and immature behaviors.

71

Consider the following excerpt from dialogue #4 where Ron, Kit, and Kat narrate the story of "birdboy." The excerpt below shows a childlike communication where Kat, Kit, and Ron are engaging in play through amusement and humor:

Ron: Nursing her wounds, her sister can't help but to be frustrated. "Why did birdboy spent the night chewing on her arm? [giggles]. Mom, why did you have a son? Don't you know about contraception?" [laughter]

Here we see that Ron played with a nonsensical idea—a birdboy chewing on his sister's arm. Her sister happened to be a fish. The humor lies in, first, the nonsense of these ideas. The humor also lies in the element of surprise of having a birdboy who has a fish sibling. Ron adds another joke, or release of tension, with the line "don't you know about contraception?" to which Kat replied:

Kat: "Well son, no. I did not. But truth be told, he is not your brother" [People gasp. Kat giggles.]

Kat's willingness to twist the plot by playing with ideas shows a sense of humor. The plot twist (i.e., "truth be told, he is not your brother") also added an element of surprise that made the story amusing to Kat, evidenced by her giggles. Kit continued:

Kit: "Because after I watched the movie Mamma Mia [laughter], I decided that I wanted to play out the plot for my own life. And so, I engaged in what mommy calls expressions of love [giggles] with many different individuals [laughter] except for your biological father."

Kit introduced yet another element of surprise by mentioning the movie *Mamma Mia*. Kit added an additional joke, or release of tension, through the line "I engaged in what mommy calls expressions of love," which brings her amusement, evidenced by her giggles.

72

Birdboy's mother apparently had a promiscuous life inspired by the movie *Mamma Mia*—

another form of play with ideas (humor). Ron continued:

> Ron: And it wasn't in Greece either. It was in Reno [laughter].

In this excerpt, we see Ron added more humor by both playing with ideas (i.e.,

Birdboy's mother living her *Mamma Mia* story in Reno, Nevada), and adding an element of

surprise to the story. Ron, Kit, and Kat displayed childlike behaviors in the sense that they

are using their imagination (e.g., a birboy who chews on his sister, the fish) in a way that

brings them amusement. The release of tension happens through a play of ideas that are

nonsensical, unexpected, and amuse the speaker at the very least. The above excerpt

provides evidence that the Flow Technique facilitated play, which in turn helped the

participants release tension and relax.

Pam mentioned that playing with imaginative and nonsensical ideas reminded her of

childhood: "For the first story—the one with the piglet and the bird—I felt like a child

again. Just coming up with silly stories and doing it with other people." Julia elaborated on

the idea that the dialogue felt innocent and childlike:

> . . .and then second round, then third round, and then after that, I mean, it was a
>
> completely unique thing. It felt so. . . innocent, so childlike. . . . I felt that childlike
>
> sense coming back of "hey! We are all pals, and we're all playing. We're all sharing
>
> this toy."

Their testimony provides evidence that the Flow Technique facilitated play by

inviting people to engage in an innocent and playful communication. Playful and innocent

communication emerged when participants shared amusing and nonsensical ideas with

humor and without agenda. It was just fun.

Below is an excerpt of Tess's contribution to her group's wild fictional story. Her vocal intonations and use of the music show childlike traits:

Tes: And then . . . [laughter from the group]. The little fish said, "If you want, you can come with me! [music accelerates]. You can go and see all the wonderful places eeeverywhereeeere [makes a mystical sound]. The planets, and the sun, and the ocean. And there is even something neeeew [mystical voice again. People laugh]. You can just go out without any fear, any hesitation, and we can expand. We can play together and dive. And even build sand castles [inside joke from the Blue Square workshop], laugh, drink, and smoke a cool joint [laughter]. And just dream.

People's eyes were wide open as they looked at Tess. Phillip's mouth was slightly open. Tess told me during our interview, "I have a really vivid inner child. It wants to play all the time. My senses open up. It's so intense. It's full of joy, it's full of curiosity—curiosity of exploring, you know? I was in my flow." The curiosity to explore that Julia mentioned is particularly important to the study at hand because, without it, play may not occur, and neither does relaxation. Below I will describe how some participants felt a freedom to explore that promoted play, relaxation, and in fact contradicted a programming of perfectionism.

Freedom to Explore

The freedom to explore is essential to a playground, and to the experience of play (Aronsson, 2010; Eberle, 2014). During the dialogue, participants felt free to explore by giving themselves permission to make mistakes. The facilitator plays an important role— more than I realized—in setting the conditions for play by truly being non-judgmental and welcoming all the ways in which people show up.

I asked Phillip when did he, as he puts it, "released every resistance" and entered a "state of peace, freedom, and trust . . . a situation where I would tell you everything." He replied:

> Actually, shortly after you opened the meeting, because your voice was very trustful. It was because of you. Your personality and your whole appearance made me say, "okay, I will open up to you." . . . I saw that everybody had this trust. I thought, "okay, I can be trustful here. I'm here with beautiful people, and they will not misuse whatever I say." But mainly it was you.

In this excerpt, we see that the tone of my voice cued Phillip's body to relax. This was especially relevant because I was the person guiding the meeting. When Phillip said "your personality and your whole appearance," I think he refers to my hairstyle (i.e., shaved) and clothing style. I arrived to the dialogue wearing casual comfortable clothes, and no makeup. I also brought the microphones in my backpacking bag. Most importantly, I was very accepting of the ways participants showed up, and the way I showed up to that space. Phillip and my testimony suggest a potential positive impact of the facilitator being perceived as relaxed, such that participants like Phillip feel safe. Phillip's testimony speaks to the idea that the facilitator's embodiment of relaxation extends an invitation for others to play and explore.

Ana explained during our interview how she felt particularly liberated, not just by my relaxed attitude, but by the fact I did not expect perfection:

> I think the lack of formality, the way you facilitated it, the buildup, the games in the beginning, how you communicated that "you don't have to be perfect. It doesn't have to be good tunes. Just play with it." I think that helped in terms of "I'm not

trying to perform." It's more like "I'm just present here and playing. I can fail, whatever failure means in that specific scenario." . . . So that was very freeing.

The word "perform" in Ana's testimony is relevant. Adults go through life performing "an ongoing repertoire of gestures and behaviors that get reenacted again and again, often without us being aware of them," suggests Taylor (2016, p.10). Taylor (2016) continues:

We human beings are born clinging to each other and fundamentally programmed to reproduce what we are taught. Submitted to this programming, in this sense, we are victims of what others have made of us. Or to put it another way, we are not ourselves, we are . . . them. (Taylor, 2016, p. 13)

The idea that we are programmed is important to my research because organizations are places where programmed performance occurs (brown, 2021). People show up in the way they are taught is the correct way to show up. Perfection, I think, is an expectation coded to such programming.

Ana's freedom to explore ("I'm not trying to perform…I can fail") is "freeing" because it contradicts a programming of perfection. She can be without having expectations placed upon her to show up differently. The freedom to explore comes from not feeling pressured to "be perfect" or perform what she has been taught by others is "good" under that scenario. Zac pointed out that "the handpan breaks that script" of "performativity." He defined performativity as being "programmed to sound great." Ana and Zac's testimonies suggest that participants felt free to explore (and play) when they realized they were not expected to sound great.

Zoe provided an interesting example of what helped her move into a stage of playful exploration: "You [Florencia] are pretty easy going. You kept saying, 'if you can't do this,

don't worry about it.' Once you held your little prop thing [the cardboard sign] upside down, and you said 'woops,' but it didn't bother you." The fact that I made a mistake and it didn't bother *me*, the person directing the meeting, made Zoe feel safe and comfortable about making mistakes. It helps, then, if the facilitator releases herself from the burden of being perfect.

The "lack of formality" and invitation to not be perfect opens something up within people. It gives them permission to have fun. Luke explained how the Flow Technique "reduced the pressure of making the story perfect, or making it make sense, because we were exploring the thoughts that came to us as they came to us." Luke's testimony suggests that the freedom to explore with the group may be key in relaxation, and thus trust.

When I asked Jack what the activity did for the group, if anything, he replied:

It creates a space, a non-hierarchical space. . . . We're sitting on the floor. We're not even sitting in chairs. We are on the floor. We're all surrounded by an instrument that we're all positioned. I was laying on my side because my back and butt were hurting. So, I was laying on my side, just like "mmaaah, I don't give a shit."

I find it interesting that, when Jack talks about "a non-hierarchical space," he talks about all of us sitting down on the same level (an even ground), in a humble manner (on the floor), and a space where he doesn't "give a shit." A "non-hierarchical space," then, is a space where he can relax.

"I think the playing beforehand facilitated that relaxation, that feeling of 'oh, this is fun. We can trust each other. We're having fun. We're laughing. It's just a game.' That takes all those filters out of the way," said Kat. In this excerpt, Kat connected fun with relaxation, and trust. Her testimony also suggests that perceiving the activity as "just a game" facilitated relaxation and trust because people felt free to make mistakes.

After each game, participants would often express their excitement by clapping or saying, "I could do this all day," "I know!" "This is so fun!" or "This is awesome." Doing so suggests that participants really enjoyed a space where they could engage in playful exploration without expectations of performance. This data also suggests that when the leader embodies relaxation, or decreases the importance of the activity by telling people that whatever they produce is ok, it helps break the programming of perfectionism. Play facilitates a "it's just a game" mindset, which helps people breathe more easily—that is, relax.

Presence

Once people felt relaxed, playful, and with permission to not "sound good," we moved into the heart of the dialogue, the autobiographical rounds. This part of the meeting was intentionally added to set the conditions for dialogic moments. The mood in the room shifted, as Ella explained:

> The story was kind of neat too, when we did our little story. The mermaid one. That was a fun: "we're playing, we're playing, we're having fun." But then when it was time to share about being seen, you can notice that we were more serious. It was almost, not like it was time to work, but it was time to share.

> "(The space) shifted," Emilia agreed. "It was less collaborative. You had to pull back from wanting to create with the person and allowing them to create on their own, holding space for them, and appreciating what they did create."

The findings suggest that, in the process of holding space and sharing personal stories, the Flow Technique facilitated presence. Below I will narrate what presence looked like while speaking and listening.

Speaking

Participants spoke during the interviews and the dialogues about the Flow Technique "clearing their mind." Julia, for example, mentioned almost at the end of the dialogue: "And to play this handpan, yeah. It's a challenge. But it took me out of my mind [a couple people said 'yeah']." When I asked Julia about this 'clearing of the mind' during the interview, she said, "I felt really in a flow. It [information] just comes so naturally. I don't think about it anymore."

It is worth mentioning that participants were not introduced to the technique as being called "The Flow Technique." They knew they would tell different kinds of stories with the handpan in front of people, but the name of the technique was unknown to them. Yet, the sense of "flow" was mentioned by other participants and described in somewhat similar ways. Pam describes her speaking experience as a "flow" that reminds her of dancing. "The mind is somewhere else," she said. "Whatever rhythm is up, the body takes it and expresses it." In this excerpt, Pam described presence as not engaging with the mind, but rather letting the body express. Her testimony matches Julia's description of flow as a "clearing of the mind."

Rachel described her speaking experience as "waves"—movement, then nothing, movement, then nothing. She puts it this way: "(There was) nothing in my mind, and then something comes up. And then there is nothing again." The water was still—"nothing in my mind"—and then information appeared (a wave) without thinking. Rachel, like Pam or Julia, was not engaging in an active, conscious search for a story or an analysis of her story as she was telling it.

Rachel's story was, interestingly, a story that led to dialogic moments with everyone in her group. When I asked her dialogue partners if they felt a strong heartfelt connection

with anyone, both identified such a connection with Rachel. "I was entranced by Rachel in particular," said Lea. "I was just like, 'you are so deep into this, you are just reliving this situation,' and I could feel it."

There were 62 mentions across the data of participants "being in the moment," being in "flow" and "out of my brain and my usual ruts." We know that art-based techniques, specifically drawings and photographs, can bring about stories that are difficult to articulate or even bring to consciousness (Singhall & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2015). That is why researchers sometimes use it as a data-collection method and even to set the stage for dialogue on lived experiences (Wagner et al., 2016). This is the first time, however, that we have examined participants who told a story while playing the handpan in front of a group during a dialogue. The data suggests that, indeed, subconscious information may be coming to the surface and verbalized in an uncensored manner.

Ella described her "relaxing" speaking experience in the following way: "There were no guards at the gate! The guards at the gate, for me, mean controls. Filters. Red tape. So, when that's not there, you're completely peaceful." Ella's testimony suggests that, not only was presence peaceful, but it also led to uncensored communication with "no guards at the gate."

Several participants found that in that 'quiet, peaceful, no guards at the gate' mental state, the story naturally came to them. "I was acting off of instinct," explained Charlotte. "If I was gonna be telling a story, I was like 'Okay, what's the first thing that popped in my head? Alright, cool. Let's do it.'"

I felt this sense of presence too. When I was telling my story, I wasn't trying to tell a story. The story told itself. It came to me, in bits and pieces. All I did was verbalize it. At times nothing would come. My mind was completely empty. In those times, I would pause

and keep playing the handpan with my mouth shut. Maybe take a breath. Then, out of nowhere, another part of the story would pop up. It didn't pop up as a sentence. I'm not exactly sure how it presented itself because it happened quickly, but it did present itself. It came as a sensation, instinct, or feeling. This feeling is exactly what I think Bell (1995) referred to when she described improvisation is a sensual method of inquiry. I call it a feeling. Bell (1995) calls it a sensual way of knowing. Kit called it "an inner knowingness." Pam called it a "waltz rhythm." Rachel called it an "up and down in my mind." "I just know what to do," Kit explained, "and then I just follow." Pam agreed, "It (the story) tells itself."

The stories that emerged from this state moved participants; they were not surface-level. They showed the humanity of each person. Listeners described these stories as "very authentic," "transparent," and "unscripted." "I remember Kat's story was really powerful. I really felt that she was being very honest and transparent in that moment," said Ron.

Jack reflected on Rachel's story, the girl who described presence as waves: "I can tell that was a vulnerable moment for her, a story that meant something to her. I was getting kind of emotional listening to that story. It was so special. So sad." In this excerpt, Jack expressed how Rachel's story, which landed on Rachel as 'nothing, then something,' moved him. As Zoe reflected, "We were showing that we're humans and that we have fears and joys and all the same feelings that you do." Ron, Jack, and Zoe's testimony provide evidence that the stories that emerged from a place of presence made the listeners feel something, a claim I will continue to unpack in Chapter 7.

A possible explanation as to why speakers were so present during the telling of the story is because of the music. The literature on music interventions argues that music-making distracts the person from their own mind, especially hypervigilant thoughts (Faulkner, 2016; de Witte et al., 2020). Music relaxes the grip of the guards at the gate. The

mind is empty, or distracted by the handpan. Zac in fact shared during the dialogue that the handpan distracted him from his own mind, or from 'his guards':

> Zac: I think it was helpful as a distraction to play with [the handpan] when telling your story. It makes it a little bit easier to tell a personal story. I was distracted with the instrument, and it's different than telling the story directly to you. . . . because I have the fear of telling you my deepest feelings without this instrument. It made it easier.

I want to emphasize the line "I have the fear of telling you my deepest feelings without this instrument." By this, Zac suggests that the mind can censor the expression of feelings; what Kat called "Controls." His testimony provides further evidence that those controls disappear with the Flow Technique, which facilitates an open or even uncensored self-expression.

In response to this, Zoe said: "I think it [the handpan] gives you something to focus on, so you don't get quite as [something] looking at everybody else."

In the above excerpt, Zoe points out it can be scary to look at another person while we talk. Instead, participants could look at the handpan, which made the dialogue less scary and more relaxing. Ana had a similar feeling:

> It [playing the handpan] kind of allowed me to distract myself and focus on that [the handpan] while talking because when I am around other people, or just talking to other people in general, is a little bit hard for me. . . . It [the handpan] helped me be less intimidated or concerned about what people are gonna think.

Ana speaks to the idea that observing the handpan while speaking is less anxiety producing than observing another person. I noticed this about myself as well, as I told one of my stories. My eyes were looking at the handpan, not people, which made it more relaxing

and introspective. It was a performance for myself in a moment of self-reflexivity. No filters. Others had the privilege of watching.

Listening

The findings in the previous section suggest that the act of speaking and playing at the same time allowed people to speak with an empty mind and without "guards at the gate." The story told itself in an uncensored manner. The findings also suggest that this "presence" lingered once the storyteller switched to listening. Across the data, participants described being "present" with others' stories. Tess used the metaphor of the Flow Technique acting as a horse blinker, which prevents horses from seeing to the side. "There is like a fence between you as the listener and the person telling the story. … And so [the speaker] is all you can see," explained Tess.

Ron agreed that his full attention was on the speaker. He mentioned this level of focus also happens to him when he smokes a marijuana joint (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Ron's Metaphor of Listening to Others' Stories: Smoking a Joint
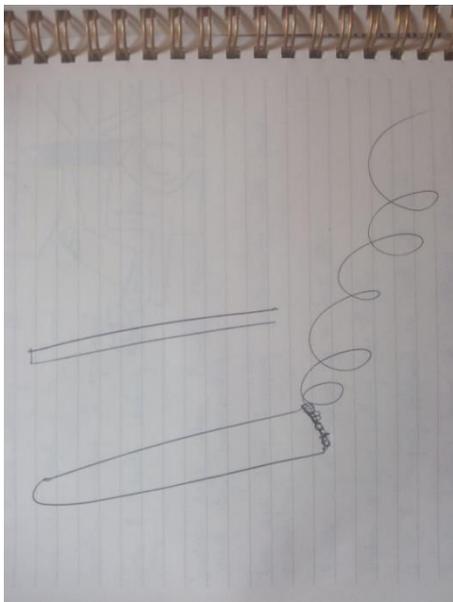
Ron: This is a marijuana joint [laughter]. . . . It kind of hones you in on some

experience. …Whatever I'm experiencing—if I'm listening to a song or watching an

episode, or listening to a person talk—that is the entire world at that moment. There

is nothing else going on [excited voice]. . . . That song completely consumes you.

In the excerpt above, we see Ron comparing his experience of the Flow Technique

to that of smoking marijuana because it 'honed' him in. Ron and Tess's testimony provide

evidence that listeners were highly focused on the stories. This is important to the study at

hand because it suggests the Flow Technique is a powerful method to facilitate deep

listening. In fact, three participants described being in a "trance state" while listening in

which "the world kind of melted away," as Ron explained. Luke showed in his drawing what

Ron meant by the world "melting away." (see Figure 6)

Figure 6

Luke's Metaphor of Listening to Others' Stories: In a Bubble
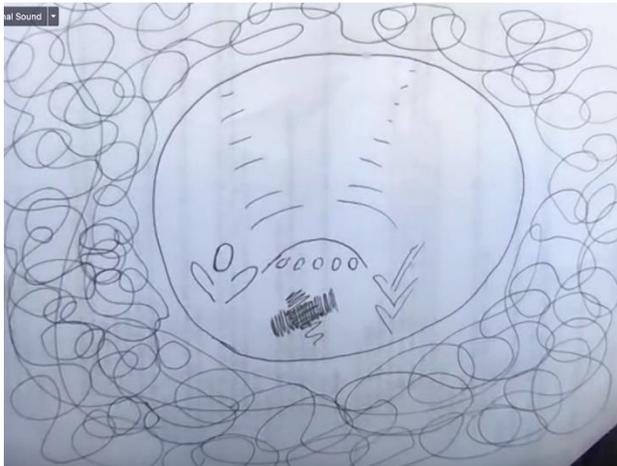
Luke explained that: "Everyone's in a bubble." A bubble is beautiful, mesmerizing,

and fragile. When I asked him what was outside the "bubble," he said:

Outside of the bubble are all the other things that are happening in the world and in our lives. But in listening, I really did feel in this space. As far as the sound, the waves and the music went, that's as far as I went. I didn't go out here [outside of the bubble]. I was in here with the stories and the music.

The fact that Luke was not thinking about the outside world—"other things that are happening"—suggests that the Flow Technique facilitated a heightened awareness in the speaker. Luke's testimony provides further evidence that the Flow Technique facilitates deep listening by potentially clearing the mind from thoughts unrelated to the dialogue. In fact, I confess it was very difficult for me to take field notes during the dialogue because I was "consumed" by participants' stories. It was hard *not* to focus on their stories.

"It's amazing how much more attentive you are while someone is playing and speaking. I'm hearing everything," said Lea during the dialogue. "Hanging on to every word," Emilia added. A few participants mentioned that in regular day-to-day conversations "sometimes we lose focus, and there is nothing to kind of lull us into that experience." Yet the combination of live handpan music, and present speakers with "no guards at the gate," appeared to create quite a listening experience for participants.

Olivia described her listening experience as watching a movie in a large-screen IMAX theater, so "consuming," in fact, that "you forget that there are people around you…. You are just *invested*, *embedded* [emphasis added] in it. Ah that shit is so good," she concluded (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Olivia's Metaphor of Listening to Others' Stories: At the IMAX Theater

Lea agreed that listening to people's stories while they played the handpan was consuming: "You're in the moment, in the present. And it's a vibe! You feel like it's a vibe. Last night was a vibe." "Oh, yeah, this was an experience," agreed Ana. Participants described the overall dialogue as "enriching" and "nourishing." What is evidenced through these comments is that the Flow Technique was perceived as beneficial.

Once the dialogue ended, people hugged each other. "What a great experience. These are the things that make life so fun and different," shared Charlotte with the group when we ended the dialogue. "It felt really fun. I was really excited," said Alec during our interview. "I wish we could have done it longer. I would have kept on going." Alec's dialogue lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes. "I was surprised by how quick it went," said Ella about her 1 hour and 30 minute dialogue. What is evidenced through these comments is that participants were so present and engaged that the passing of time was suspended.

Most participants did not leave immediately once the dialogue ended. Some stayed behind to chat. No one rushed to their phone. "There's this sense of play that kind of made

me sad when we all left. I wanted to keep playing. I wanted to tell more stories together,"

explained Luke. Phillip didn't want to leave either. He told me that the Flow Technique

reminded him of the beach, where he feels happy and sad (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Phillip's Metaphor of Listening to Others' Stories: Sitting on the Beach

"Similar to the beach, the joy is that you get the feeling that anything's possible.

Possibilities. Limitless." I was happy to hear Phillip say "anything was possible" during our

dialogue. A dialogue *is* supposed to bring possibilities into existence (Nadal, 2010), and that

effort to create through communication is what sets the discipline apart (Barbour et al.,

2018). Phillip continued:

> And then the sadness of it is that you gotta go back to the academy. I'm at the beach
>
> just like "hell, yeah, dude, this is awesome! You know, this is the best!" And then
>
> there comes a time . . . where I gotta go back to the reality of the structured way of
>
> doing things.

> From Phillip's comment here we see perhaps an unspoken plea for play and

relaxation in workplace cultures that tend to be structured, including the academic culture.

Summary

In this chapter, I showed my participants' journey as a way to respond to RQ1: "What did participants describe experiencing in and because of the Flow Technique that promoted trust, dialogue, and/or dialogic moments, if anything?" Findings indicate that participants experienced relaxation. The relaxation was facilitated by the music, a sense of play through humor, and childlike communication (i.e., nonsensical and amusing ideas), the freedom to explore (not perform), and a heightened presence in the now moment. Some speakers described presence as a "flow," or an "instinct." The listeners described presence as being "here," 'embedded in the story,' and a "melting of the outside world." In the next chapter, I will show the moments during the Flow Technique when participants experienced a clear, and deep heartfelt connection to another participant (i.e., dialogic moments) or experienced moments of disconnection.

CHAPTER 7

LESSONS ON DIALOGIC MOMENTS

This chapter presents findings related to the second research question, which is divided into two parts. First: "In which moments, if any, did the listener feel a heartfelt connection with another participant during the dialogue?"

As described in Chapter 3, a dialogic moment is a brief moment of deep, strong heartfelt connection with another human. These moments can happen when people have a quality of contact that leads to mutual awareness of, and engagement with, the other's humanity and multifaceted self. The Flow Technique set the conditions for connection by orchestrating several activities that positioned participants to engage in dialogue.

Fifteen out of 19 interviewees answered "yes" when asked if they experienced a strong, deep, heartfelt connection with another participant at any point during the dialogue. They proceeded to walk me through those moments. Some dialogic moments occurred when the participant felt welcomed and appreciated. "After I told my stories, it [the moment of connection] happened when y'all snapped your fingers. So it was that feeling of affirming and validating that 'oh, yeah, these stories are unique unto themselves,'" said Kit. She was not the only participant who claimed to feel a dialogic moment when she saw the positive validation from the group.

I felt it too, the first time I told my story in front of the group. Once I began telling the story, I felt strange. I'm used to telling stories, but suddenly I was aware that I didn't know the people in the group. I hadn't gone through the warm ups they went through, and I was sharing a very personal moment—a time I felt seen during my prospectus defense. I hesitated, and looked up to see the group watching me narrate the story. I didn't know if anyone was really listening. I looked down at the handpan and thought, "well, at least the

handpan is listening." When I finished my story, the group clapped and smiled. I felt relieved that they were paying attention. The most memorable part was hearing Ron say, "Wow. That was beautiful. I'm so happy that you had that experience. It's easy to feel your joy." I placed my hand on my chest and said "'thank you.'" Somehow, I felt moved by Ron's reaction and the fact that he seemed to understand why the story was meaningful to me.

We know that dialogic moments can happen in moments of reassurance. The combination of sharing with courage, and receiving a validating response can lead to dialogic moments (Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008). However, dialogic moments may emerge in other ways, especially when two people have shared a similar experience. Several participants described experiencing a deep heartfelt connection as they listened to a story that resembled one of their past experiences. There were 46 references across the data of what from now on I will call moments of emotional convergence.

Emotional Convergence

Dialogic moments happened on the listener's end, when the listener perceived knowing how the storyteller felt, since the listener experienced a similar situation in the past or present. The listener knew how it felt to be in the situation the speaker described in the story, for they'd experienced something similar as well.

For example, Ella narrated during the dialogue what her perfect yoga studio would look like: a studio that applies for grants as a means of making yoga accessible to less privileged populations. Here is an excerpt from Ella's fictional story:

> I turn on the computer. I notice that our yoga studio just received a huge grant so we can offer yoga to people who don't have access to yoga. Because it's our mission to make sure that everybody who wants yoga has access to yoga.

Lea described feeling a heartfelt connection in that precise moment. She shared during our interview that:

As an African American woman, I know that yoga is not accessible, and typically it is not accessible to people of color, or women of color…. So I want to be able to create those spaces myself. When she [Ella] said that, I was like "oh, she has a desire to reach back. Help those who are less privileged."

Lea felt a heartfelt connection when she realized Ella and she shared the same desire to make yoga accessible to "those who are less privileged," a conversation they'd never had before the dialogue. "To understand what she at her heart really wants to do with yoga and how to touch people. That really resonated with me," said Lea. When Lea said "that really resonated with me," she suggests that the heartfelt connection emerged because they both shared a similar passion to make yoga accessible.

Indeed, the participants described moments of emotional convergence as moments of emotional resonance. It wasn't just that their experiences converged, but that their feelings converged. The convergence occurred in the midst of the speaker's story, when the listener realized something along the lines of "I experienced that as well," "I understand that feeling," and "I can relate to those things happening in life," "I understand what that is. I relate to that," as participants later told me in the interviews.

Convergence appears in the literature as an element of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Giles, 1973). CAT explains that communicators often adjust their speech to be similar to their interlocutors. The term "convergence" speaks to the idea that the speaker mimics, consciously or unconsciously, the rate of speech, pauses, and accents of the interlocutor (Giles, 2016). Convergence can create a sense of closeness with the group, and facilitate comprehension (Gasiorek et al., 2021).

CAT has explored mostly the convergence of pronunciation, accent and speech rate, especially across members of different nationalities once they spend time interacting (Giles, 2016). Although CAT doesn't typically explore the convergence of topics or emotions, the topic convergence found on this study, in a couple of the dialogue, meets the theory's proposition that people's communication becomes more similar to each other's over the course of an interaction (Gasiorek et al., 2021; Giles, 2016).

Topical convergence occurred in dialogue one and four. In dialogue one, three out of six participants told stories of office parties. In dialogue four, the three participants told stories of teaching. The convergence of topics facilitated a convergence of feelings in relation to those similar topics. For example, Pam offered her office party story after listening to Olivia and Zac's office party stories.

Once a person in the group activates a concept or a theme (e.g., office party where someone said nice things) then that makes a similar memory more accessible in the other person's mind (e.g., retirement party where someone said nice things). One person raising a topic can make it more accessible for others, increasing the likelihood that they will, in turn, communicate a related story (Gasiorek & Aune, 2021). This "meme-activation," as Gasiorek & Aune (2021) call it, facilitates communication convergence.

More so than the activation and sharing of similar stories, the data suggests that what sparked dialogic moments was not only the convergence of similar stories, but the convergence of feelings in relation to that story. Pam, for example, who 'didn't connect' with the office setting Olivia provided, nonetheless felt a deep connection with Olivia when she noticed Olivia's "huge surprise about it [colleagues' showing gestures of love at work]…that's what I could feel." Pam told me she received gestures of love at her retirement party, and so she "could easily relate to the setting they gave us." Zoe also fell

into dialogic moments with "the people that told office party stories. …I had the same experience with my retirement," she explained. By this, Zoe suggests she felt a connection with those who also experienced what she experienced in her retirement party—surprise by her colleagues' expressions of love. Their testimonies suggest that deep heartfelt connection happened during moments of emotional convergence. Zac, for example, described his dialogic moment when Alec told the story of soon getting together with a loved one:

> It happened when she said that she is so happy to soon go back to Europe to meet this lady she lived with before. I felt really . . . I had deep compassion. That's similar to my situation…. Even though I've been away from home only for a few days, I miss my wife very much. I miss her. I really have deep compassion for Alec, and I could feel this love that she has for this person. That one touched me the most out of all the stories.

In the above excerpt, Zac described how Alec's situation is similar to his, and Alec's story touched him the most. Zac's testimony suggests that he felt a deep connection with Alec because they are sharing similar feelings in relation to a similar situation. I asked Zac if he connected with anyone else besides Alec. He said no, not even with Charlotte, whose story sparked more than one dialogic moment with that group. He connected with Alec "more than with the others…. I think she is in love with this person she wants to return to…. I really felt this joy."

I want to emphasize the line "I really felt this joy." Like Pam, Zac said he felt the speaker's emotion. In the communication literature, the act of feeling with another, particularly in the context of emotional work[4], is related to empathy (Kanov et al., 2004).

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[4] A job that requires emotion and emotional communication

Empathy is thought of as a precursor to compassion (Kanov et al., 2004; Miller, 2007; Tietsort, 2021). The act of feeling with another can then mobilize the person to act so she may alleviate the other's distress (i.e., compassion).

Interestingly, some emotion workers (e.g., teachers, counselors) label empathy as connection (Miller, 2007). Furthermore, they perceive "connection" as both (a) a cognitive process of understanding what is happening with another or taking their perspective, and (b) a feeling that arises by being present and sharing an emotional experience with the other (Miller, 2007). Smith (2017), who studies the Philosophy of the Mind and Phenomenology, would agree: empathy is a feeling which provides us with the knowledge of how others feel.

Smith (2017) also theorizes that a person can only access how another person truly feels if she has been in a matching conscious state herself. For example, a person knows what if feels like to be discriminated against only if they've experienced discrimination at some point in their lives. If the person has never experienced anything that mimics the speaker's way of feeling, then the listener won't know how the speaker truly feels (Smith, 2017). Using Smith's (2017) explanation, we can argue that Zac felt Alec's joy because he has felt the same joy of returning to a lover. They have had matching emotional states (i.e., joy of returning to a lover) under a similar situation (i.e., after not seeing that lover for a while). The emotional convergence sparked a deep heartfelt connection from Zac to Alec as he identified in himself the joy he perceived in Alec. His testimony provides further evidence that emotional convergence sparks dialogic moments, especially when two people have experienced a similar situation.

Tess in fact claimed that the lack of emotional convergence made it difficult for her to feel a deep heartfelt connection with Luke:

94

I was walking in with a little bit more understanding [into other people's stories], especially in your story with how much you cared about this project. That's easy for me to relate to. Charlotte's experience with her dad is also very easy for me to relate to. But Luke's experience with his friends, that's just not something.... it's a very different relationship. So it was hard for me to connect with that story, just because I didn't have a lot of similar experiences.

In this excerpt, Tess described not experiencing a deep heartfelt connection with Luke because she has not experienced the situation Luke described in his story. As she explained, 'it was hard to connect with that story because I didn't have a lot of similar experiences.'

Tess's testimony is important because it raises the question as to whether dialogic moments can occur between people whose past experiences don't match. This question becomes especially relevant given the evidence that dialogic moments emerged when two people's experiences and feelings in relation to that shared experience converged.

Tess's testimony converges with Miller's (2017) findings. A few emotion workers confessed they struggled to connect with adults and children of different races and cultures whose upbringing were very different from their own. Emotion workers are skilled practitioners of empathy–they practice it for a living–yet some appear to struggle when another's culture, upbringing, or certain experiences don't match. If emotion workers experience this connection struggle, it raises the question as to whether dialogue participants, who may be far less skilled in practicing empathy, are able to connect deeply when there is a lack of emotional convergence.

Consider Kat's description of emotional convergence with Ella. Ella described a situation that, as Kat told me, was very similar to what she experienced:

It [the heartfelt connection] happened with Ella's story, the last time she felt seen, because I experienced something pretty similar at the very beginning of my grad school program. The first year for me was very, very lonely. When she was telling her story, I felt that. I was flashbacked (sic) to myself. When I experienced it…. I understand what that feeling is like…. it was like, "yes, yes, I get you. I see you. I felt it." So that moment was very deep. I felt the things she was feeling in her story.

I want to bring the reader's attention to the line "I felt the things she was feeling in her story." Kat, like Zac and Pam, described feeling what the storyteller felt in the situation they narrated. The feeling exists, as Kat pointed out, because both Ella and Kat have had matching experiences of loneliness in the beginning of grad school. Kat knows how it feels to be lonely. Her body remembers loneliness. There is no way of knowing whether Kat would have experienced a dialogic moment during the telling of Ella's story had she not experienced loneliness in a similar context.

Interestingly, Buddhism addresses the value of pain convergence. We see Kat practicing a Buddhist term called *bodhichitta*, which posits that suffering can open the heart to the suffering of others; an openness that Buddha equated to enlightenment (Chodron, 2002). We can let suffering harden our hearts or feel the pain that we share with others. Shared experiences of pain can become a link to others. That is the beauty of pain.

The convergence of pain, and not just joy or passion, led to heartfelt connections. Frank felt a connection when he noticed a pain convergence in his group. During our interview, he explained emotional convergence as: "I see you. I get you. We're all in the struggle together. And sometimes you feel alone. And I hear other people have vulnerabilities about their place in the academy. So I'm not alone in my feelings." Lea

96

elaborated on the relief she felt from hearing that others' struggles in academia match hers. Like Frank, the pain convergence decreased Lea's loneliness:

> The experience [the dialogue] got me out of my head. I realized "oh, my struggles are not unique. Other people have similar experiences." And so it contributed to the feeling of being less alone and more in community—we have shared struggles, shared fears, shared joys.

In the above excerpt, we see Lea fall into a dialogic moment when she realizes her struggles, fears, and joys are shared (i.e., emotional convergence). Lea and Frank described these moments of (pain) convergence as dialogic moments. It is unclear whether Frank and Lea would have fallen into a dialogic moment listening to stories of struggle through graduate school if they hadn't struggle through grad school themselves.

There was a moment of explicit emotional convergence during one of the dialogues. After the autobiographical storytelling round, I asked participants what was on their mind. Ana looked at Kit and said: "I felt the same. I am also recently divorced [giggles]. I also completely went through that [what Kit shared]. So hearing Kit's story, I was like, 'that's me.'" For both Ana and Kit, this was a dialogic moment. During our interview, Kit summarized their dialogic moments in the following way: "It was definitely there (the heartfelt connection) where you just feel like, 'Oh, we're all the same.'"

In Kit's testimony, we see them experience the Buber-Rogers notion of a dialogic moment—a (mutual) recognition and acceptance that simultaneously transcended the perception of difference (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). The shift of perception, from difference to unity, happened when Kit recognized an emotional convergence between Ana and herself (i.e., similar feelings after a divorce) that led to a perception of unity (i.e., "oh,

97

we're all the same"). Kit and Ana's testimonies suggest that emotional convergence has the potential to spark dialogic moments.

Mutual vs. One-Sided Connection

Dialogic moments have long been considered a mutual feeling; a feeling of connection that happens for two people. Although dialogic moments happen in the presence of two or more people, the findings in this study suggest that the connection may not always be mutual. During the cross-examination of the interviews, I noticed three participant categories: dyads who experienced a mutual connection, dyads who experienced a one-sided connection, and individuals who experienced no connection. This is important to the study at hand because it expands the notion that dialogue is a heartfelt connection not necessarily felt by two people. Rather, this evidence suggests that dialogic moments can be perceived by only one member of the dyad.

In what is left of this chapter, I will first summarize the patterns that emerged across dyads who experienced a mutual connection. These patterns are important because they help us understand what type of communication sets the conditions for dialogic moments, and the ways in which artistic improvisation contributes to dialogue. I will finish the chapter by describing the patterns that emerged across individuals who experienced no connection. These patterns help us understand what conditions may complicate dialogic moments from emerging, and the limitations of dialogue itself.

The dialogic moments across dyads happened in moments of emotional convergence. The speaker shared a story that made the listener perceive a matching feeling—perhaps of joy, perhaps of pain—in relation to a similar experience. There were nine dyads who experienced a mutual connection. Both members of the dyad had a dialogic moment while listening to the other's story.

It is worth noting, however, that the listener's heartfelt connection for the speaker was not always reciprocated on the speaker's end. There were five dyads who experienced a one-sided connection. For example, Phillip felt a heartfelt connection toward Julia while listening to her story. Julia, on the other hand, did not experience a heartfelt connection toward Phillip while listening to his story.

This study does not have enough data to make claims as to why sometimes the connections were one-sided. I didn't find patterns in this particular category. Furthermore, let us remember that humans are complex creatures, and all sorts of dynamics can be influencing the reason why some connections were one-sided, including gender, age, beliefs about connection, previous interactions, or even physical appearance. I did not find a clear pattern across the one-sided dyads that may explain why their connection was one-sided.

Some dyads in the mutual category, however, engaged in additional behaviors, besides emotional convergence, that the one-sided dyads didn't. The patterns I found across some mutual-connection dyads may help explain why the dialogic moments for both parties. These dyads shared three different characteristics that the one-sided dyads did not: (a) an already established relationship, (b) gestures of care and liking, and (c) providing intimate details in their stories. I will cover each characteristic below. Please not that I will not use pseudonyms in the remaining of the chapter to further prevent deductive disclosure.

Established Relationship

The five "one-sided" dyads did not have a previous relationship with one another. Yet, heartfelt connections can happen among strangers. In fact, four out of the nine dyads that experienced a mutual connection either met that day or had seen each other very few times. This shows that dialogic moments can happen with people we don't know well. That said, five out of nine mutual-connection-dyads already had an established friendship.

99

Participant 5 (i.e., P5) and Participant 6 (i.e., P6), for example, were good friends. P5

explained that the Flow Technique "really, in some ways, made me appreciate P6 more than

I already did…. I felt more connected to her and more love for her."

In this excerpt, P5 explained that she already had a strong friendship with P6, which

P6 also confirmed during our interview. They already had an appreciation for one another.

The dialogue simply increased their mutual appreciation.

Participant 7 (i.e., P7) and Participant 8 (i.e., P8) were another example of a mutual-

connection dyad who offered their friendship as one of the reasons why the heartfelt

connection emerged. Hence, a mutual connection may be more likely to occur during a

dialogue if both people already have an established relationship.

The three participants from Collective 1 already had a friendship, and the same

happened with Collective 2. In these two dialogues, all connections were mutual. This data

suggest that dialogic moments are more likely to happen if participants already have a

friendship or established relationship.

Gestures of Care and Liking

Some of the mutual-connection individuals showed "sweet" gestures that were not

shown by the one-sided individuals; gestures that reflected care or liking for the other

person. P7 told me she felt a strong connection with P8 "after noticing P8 crying during my

story…noticing P8 get emotional." We see in this testimony that P7 was touched by P8's

crying in response to P7's suffering. P8's tears reflected a care for P7, which intensified P7's

connection with P8.

Another example is P9, who experienced a dialogic moment during P10 and P11's

stories. P10 also felt a connection during P9's story, but P11 did not. When I asked P9 about

her dialogic moments, she mentioned an additional moment of connection with P10: "P10

said, as we were both noticing the 'small group' being reiterated around. She said: 'we're never gonna let you go.' I thought, 'Oh, how sweet is that?'"

In the above excerpt, we see P10 telling P9 that the group likes her, hence, "they are never going to let her go." The sweetness of that comment made P9 feel a strong heartfelt connection with P10 in that moment. I wonder if, by expressing her liking for P9, P10 was increasing her chances of falling into a dialogic moment during P9's story. If we compare P10's behavior and P11's behavior toward P9, where one (P10) is articulating a phrase that implies liking while the other (P11) isn't, this finding suggests that offering words of liking not only facilitates a dialogic moment for the receiver, but potentially for the giver as well.

Personal Details in the Stories

Some of the listeners in the "mutual-connection" category explained that they were touched by the details the speaker provided. P12, for example, told a story during the dialogue in which he conveyed a word by word conversation over the phone, his reaction to the conversation, and the content of a letter. The story gave us a glimpse into a very personal moment in his life. During our interview, P13 explained how P12's story was 'incredibly full of depth and artistic.' When I asked her what "artistic" meant to her, P13 replied: "when I say artistic, I really mean it was just so much more detailed. You could really feel it…. So I guess when I'm saying artistic, I'm thinking of all the little details that were there."

I want to emphasize the line "you could really feel it." P13's testimony contributes to the claim that improvisation facilitates a form of communication that makes the listener feel. Through the Flow Technique, specifically, participants created artistic stories that were abundant in details and, hence, made the listeners feel. This did not necessarily happen across the one-sided dyads.

The mutual-connection dyads shared intimate details—for example, word-by-word conversations, innermost thoughts, reactions, and context—that revealed the meaningfulness of the story. P14's story, like P12's, was full of nuanced details. She revealed the context, where she was positioned in the scene, word by word conversations she had with the characters of her story, disclosed a range of painful and joyful feelings, and thoughts in relation to the scene. It was a sincere and captivating story. P15 told me during our interview that P14's story "was so detailed…She was very in the story. I was there. I could picture myself, and feel the feelings that she was feeling in that moment." His testimony suggests the details in P14's story ("it was so detailed") helped him feel what she felt ('I could feel the feelings that she was feeling in that moment'). P16 was also moved by the vulnerability of the story: "It's different when someone shares a struggle. And I'm just able to see a much more intimate side of that person."

The interpersonal literature (Laurenceau et al., 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1998) would agree that an intimate self-disclosure is one of "the most important activities" for the development and maintenance of relational closeness and intimacy (Baxter, 2004, p.4). However, I want to bring to the reader's attention P16's line: "I'm able to see a much more intimate side of that person." What captivated P16 was witnessing "a much more intimate side" of P14 through learning about her struggle.

The details that P14 shared brought to life what Bakhtin calls aesthetic love—witnessing another facet of an individual. Aesthetic love reminds me of the way actors aim to create three dimensional characters who do not always feel and behave the same way. Showing different aspects of a character makes the character more interesting, human, and real. This is important to the study at hand because witnessing another side of P14, through

102

the details she provided in her (artistic) story, helped both P16 and P15 feel a heartfelt connection toward her.

The details in P14's story also created a sense of depth. Communicators tend to perceive deep talk as beautiful (Baxter and DeGooyer, 2001). "Deep Talk" is the idea that at least one member of the dyad "opens their souls" by revealing innermost thoughts (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001, p.10). When the speaker engages in deep talk, the listener may fall into a dialogic moment (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001). The findings in this study suggest that what makes a talk deep are the personal details the narrator provides. This is important to the study at hand because the mutual-connection dyads may have engaged in "deeper talk" than the one-sided dyads.

P16, for example, experienced dialogic moments during P14 and P15's stories. Yet, neither P14 or P15 experienced a dialogic moment during P16's story. When I asked P14 about this, he explained that P16's stories weren't deep enough, that she did not open her soul, as Baxter and DeGooyer (2001) would describe depth. "I just didn't feel it. And I think again, because she didn't show vulnerability. She didn't seem to have opened up a lot. I didn't exactly feel something different when I saw her or felt any differently towards her," explained P14.

In this excerpt, we see P14 pointing out that he "just didn't feel it [the story]" which is important because dialogic moments are feeling-based. If the listener is not feeling a story, chances are he won't be able to feel a connection toward the speaker either. We also see P14 offering a reason as to why he didn't feel the story: "She [P16] didn't seem to have opened up a lot." By this, P14 suggests that P16 did not reveal personal details that showed a different side of her. P14 didn't get to see another facet of P16, especially a more intimate or "vulnerable" one. Hence, P14 "didn't exactly feel something different…or felt any

103

differently" toward P16 after she told her story. This data suggests that we can see another facet of the speaker (i.e., aesthetic love) based on the details she reveals. Personal and "soul opening" details that show a different side of that person can facilitate heartfelt connection.

This particular finding advances our understanding of the ways in which improvisation contributes to dialogue. We know that art can free self-expression, but this study is offering qualitative evidence for what an artistic self-expression looks like. The Flow Technique facilitated stories rich in personal details that made the listener feel—and dialogic moments are feeling based. They can't occur if the person is not able to feel a story. Therefore, improvisation contributes to dialogue by inspiring speakers to tell a story that is deep, rich in personal detail, shows another side of the speaker, and moves the listener. Yet, to narrate artistic stories, the findings suggest that the speaker has to be present, and open their hearts (i.e., not be cautious). Not everyone was ready to do this, as I am about to explain next.

Mental Noise

The last category is comprised of four individuals who did not experience connection with anyone and no one in the group felt particularly connected to them either. These individuals were Participant 1, 2, 3, and 4. Their experiences during the dialogue contradict some of the patterns I have described so far (i.e., presence, relaxation, details in the stories). In what is left of this chapter, I will show their experiences to answer the second part of the research question, which is: "What did participants describe experiencing that made it more difficult for dialogic moments to emerge during the Flow Technique?" What these four participants described experiencing was mental noise and cautiousness.

As I mentioned in Chapter 6, 15 participants experienced a heightened sense of presence during the dialogue. Granted, thoughts were still happening. P18 and P19, for

example, had strong connectivity; they felt heartfelt connections to others in the space, and others felt a heartfelt connection with them. P18 and P19 claimed feeling disconnected at times during moments of thinking. P19 explained:

I think the disconnection is more internal. It is when I get into my head, and then I'm not as present. So I lose that connection to you all, to the space around me. For instance, when I think of something, and it brings me down this trail of tangential things.

What P18 and P19 had in common was their ability to redirect their attention to the present, for which they used different strategies. P18 would pay attention to her senses, especially visual (e.g., "'oh, the grass is green. Oh, there are birds.' And it brings me back"). The second is tactile (e.g., "oh, the floor feels like this.") P19 used the strategy of talking herself back to the present. She would tell herself: "Oh, wait. Come back. Where are you right now? Focus on this," as she explained to me in our interview.

The four people who did not experience connectivity (i.e., they didn't connect deeply to others and others didn't feel deeply connected to them during the dialogue) went through a different mental experience. First, they experienced an uncontrolled mental noise. Before I describe their narrations, I want to disclaim that writing about other people's thoughts comes with challenges and limitations. First, I can't see the participants' thoughts. I rely mostly on their descriptions of their own mind. Second, thoughts can be fleeting, subtle, murky and hard to catch. Participants, and people in general, are not always aware of their thinking. I believe this was the case for P1.

P1 and I had our interview a week after the dialogue. When I asked what it was like to listen to each person's autobiographical story, she couldn't recall the content of the stories. P1 then answered my question with an opinion of each person's storytelling abilities:

P5 was working hard at it. I felt like he took it on past what was necessary when he was making a point or something. I thought he did pretty well with the drum. He was better at the drum and P2 was really good at storytelling…. P2 ought to be in storytelling. I think she's just magical at that…. Maybe because she was so comfortable telling the story, she got right into the handpan, or she was just kind of in a flow.

It is interesting that when I asked about her experience, P1 eventually provided some visceral sensations (e.g., "I got a little tired," "I felt drawn to her at certain times"), yet her initial response was an analysis of the participants' skills (i.e., "P5 did pretty well with the drum and P2 was really good at storytelling"). I think her answer gives us a glimpse into her mental state as she listened to the stories.

I also found it interesting that P1 perceived P2 as being "so comfortable telling the story." That was not my impression of P2 at all. In fact, P2 told me during our interview that her speaking experience was uncomfortable. What is evidenced by the contradiction of P1's and P2's narrations is that P1 was possibly distracted by her own thinking, and not noticing that P2 was actually struggling to speak, as P2 confirmed during our interview.

P2 described herself as "distracted" with concerns while speaking. "I kept thinking, believing, reminding myself that I was not proficient with the instrument…. That [mental noise] really cut me off from what I was doing." In this excerpt, we see P2 judging her proficiency with the instrument, which made it difficult for her to play, explore, and speak.

I confess I didn't understand P2's autobiographical story. "At some point, I was all over the place," explained P2. "I was really shifting my focus; I was noticing that I was no longer there. Realizing that I was drifting off startled me and interrupted the flow…. As soon as I wasn't 100% there—ugh, gosh [makes sound of discomfort]."

In the above excerpt, P2 described the opposite of presence. While some participants were able to relax, and narrate artistic stories from that state of calm presence, P2 experienced a mental chatter that reminded her she was not proficient with the instrument. P2's testimony shows that some people have much more difficulty experiencing an empty mind while speaking, and using the Flow Technique.

P2 also experienced a mental chatter in regards to other people while they told their story. She told me: "If you're asking me if I felt a heartfelt connection, no, and this is why: because my mind was very arrogantly chatting away. Without my thoughts being words, right? But I could feel it," she said, continuing:

> They [the thoughts] make my mind feel terribly, terribly smart about itself. It's bullshit. But it is that kind of "I would have done this" or "they could be doing that" or "I could tell them how to do it." And that sucks. You can't have a heartfelt connection when that's going on.

What P2 described experiencing during the dialogue is a mental noise, or an analysis, of how others should be playing. The analysis kept P2 from tuning in and receiving the stories—a metaphor I will continue to unpack throughout the chapter. We also see P2 engaging in critical reflexivity. Critical reflexivity is a form of thinking in which we question our assumptions and beliefs (Cunliffe, 2009). We also examine our actions and reflect on the impact of those actions. Critical reflexivity excludes a reflection of the world 'out there,' –the world's unethical behaviors, conspiracies, or power dynamics–but rather questions the self's beliefs and perceptions. It is an unsettling, uncomfortable examination of the assumptions underlying our actions, and the impact of those actions (Cunliffe, 2004).

We see P2 examining, during our interview, the fact that her thoughts 'make her mind feel terribly smart about itself,' an experience she considers unreal ("it's bullshit"). She

also reflects on the consequences of the 'arrogant' mental chatter: a lack of heartfelt connection. I asked P2 if she reflected on these things before our interview, to which she replied no. Our interview facilitated a space for critical-reflexivity.

P3, like Charlotte, told me during our interview she couldn't engage with the other participants' stories. She compared her listening experience to drowning (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

P3's Metaphor of Listening to Others' Stories: Drowning
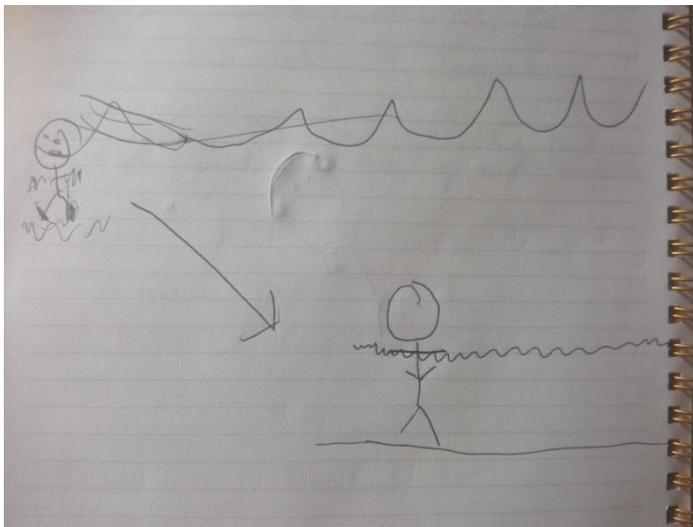
In her drawing, P3 illustrated the difference between being able to listen and not listen. At times she could listen—this is symbolized by the person who is standing in the ocean able to breathe. "There's some ground to stand," she explained. But at times she couldn't listen, symbolized by the person drowning under ocean waves. The waves represent thoughts:

I was not stilling the water inside, internally. I wasn't fully present. I wasn't listening. I was letting the waves of thought kind of wash over me…. I'm kind of narrating it

108

as a choice. I don't know how much choice there is. Sometimes it feels like it's more

of a hurricane. It's out of my control how calm the waters are.

In the above excerpt, P3 described being unable to redirect her attention to the

present by quieting her mind. P3's comment on choice is relevant. I think facilitators and

teachers, myself included, sometimes assume that people can direct their full attention to the

room by consciously choosing to. That is why sometimes facilitators instruct participants to

be present. Yet, P3's testimony raises the question as to whether or not people can direct

their attention to the present, and engage in dialogue.

The dialogue P3 was a part of, The Flow Technique, was very dynamic to prevent

the mind from wandering. A 1 hour and 30 minute meeting where everyone is sitting down

and talking can be boring and can challenge our ability to stay present. I added music-

making, storytelling, games, and memorization to make it easy for participants to stay

present. Despite the meeting design, P3 claimed to have drifted away and to 'not have felt'

other people's stories. This is important since dialogic moments are feelings. Hence, if the

person is not able to feel (perhaps because he is distracted) the heartfelt connection won't

happen. A generous portion of my interview with P3 concerned "all that noise that's

happening in my head" that kept him from being "fully involved."

I find P3's testimony especially important because P3 wanted connection. As she

told me, "I had this really big urge to connect…. I wanted to feel vulnerable with the

group." Yet, as people began telling their stories, "I started noticing myself drift away from

the group and instead fixate on 'what am I going to share?'" she explained.

I find P3's "big urge to connect" extremely relevant. The willingness to engage in

dialogue is key to it happening (Poulos, 2008). If P3 didn't want to be in the room nor

109

intended connection, it makes sense that her attention would drift. But the fact that P3 wanted connection and experienced no connectivity is worth noticing.

Dialogue not only occurs in facilitated meetings but also in day-to-day conversations. Presence is needed in both instances. If P3 experiences the same disconnection in conversations that are not designed to be engaging, chances are she is struggling to fall into dialogic moments in regular conversations, and cultivate a sense of closeness with others. The fact that a person struggles to engage in dialogue, even though she wants to, and is potentially experiencing isolation—one of the most painful experiences we can endure as humans (Jordan, 2008a; Van der Kolk, 2014)—is worth our attention.

P4 described a hurricane of thoughts especially while speaking. Below is P4's description of his speaking experience with the Flow Technique (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

P4's Description of Speaking While Playing the Handpan: Ambivalent Overwhelm

He explained that "on the one hand, it's like thumbs up because he likes it, and on the other side thumbs down because he hates it," which suggests ambivalence. I asked P4 what's on the man's head. "These are just flashes coming into the head from different sides…like 'Oh, I'm overwhelmed. Oh God.'" The flashes symbolize thoughts.

Like P1, P4 couldn't remember the content of the stories. He instead provided an analysis of people's music-making skills:

Sometimes I was quite annoyed. One or two people in the group always played the same [way]. There were no changes in their music because they were so concentrated on the story. It was quite boring that they didn't try to make a melody. So the musician part of me thought "can't she just put one finger in another part [of the handpan] instead of always, like, meeeh." That made me a bit, like, "stop, please, I can't listen anymore."

There are two parts of this excerpt I want to emphasize. First, P4 is not the first person to describe feeling "annoyed" or challenged by a particular person's musicality. Some participants described people's overall communication as music, and some songs were more pleasant than others. Yet, the listener plays a role in choosing to listen nonetheless. P10, for example, compared her listening experience to that of a radio, where she gets to tune in to the music she prefers. She explained that, for her, the choice to tune in depends on comfort:

With whom do I quickly feel the same or a familiar level of communication…. If I find that the person's [communication] is touching me in a nice way, in a comfortable way, then it's like that radio dialing dials to a point of receiving. If it's a challenging situation, then I think "do I dial to a different place?"

I appreciate P10's metaphor of listening as an act of receiving. By "receiving," P10 suggests sitting with someone's words before providing a response (if any). Her metaphor also symbolizes the choice to not listen by changing the radio channel or even turning the radio off. This comparison is important because dialogue is often about tuning in to others even when—and perhaps especially when—their ideas, style, and overall communication is different from ours. Some participants were able to do this, and others weren't.

P11, for example, compared P12's communication to jazz: "P12 is jazz. Jazz can be sporadic, spontaneous, and energetic. It does have a beginning and an end, so there is meaning and purpose. But it feels all over the place." In this excerpt, we see P11 sharing that she didn't love P12's story and music. Although P11 felt P12's story/music was "all over the place," she was able to dial in and receive. P11 connected through moments of emotional convergence, despite not enjoying P12's communication/music. A dialogic moment during P12's "jazzy" story happened when P11 perceived P12 to be struggling to publicly admit she wants recognition. P11 told me that she (P11) also struggles to accept her desire for recognition: "That was another heartfelt moment where I saw her and I was like, 'she's being humble. I want the same thing [to be valued and recognized].' And I want to tell her she's valued and she's recognized."

In this excerpt, we see P11 describing a heartfelt connection when she perceived P12 and herself struggling to accept the part of them that wants recognition. This data suggests that P11 was able to connect with P12 through emotional convergence, despite the unpleasant "jazzy" vibe of P12's communication.

P4's listening experience was different. The mental noise made it difficult for him to dial in, and receive. In the excerpt below, he explained what the mental noise looked like:

> Two people combined it [music-making and speaking] quite well, better than I did. So I was like "that is cool. I wish I could have done it like that." And with others I thought "oooh, this music style is complete shit." It sounds judgmental, right? But these are the voices that came up. I was even observing my voices and speaking with myself. Like, "why do you judge? Let her do her thing! Why is there this judgment? Why am I so annoyed about such a little thing?"

112

I want to emphasize the internal conversation happening in P4's mind. In the excerpt above, we see P4's thoughts questioning his other thoughts. Although an analysis of P4's thoughts is beyond the scope of this dissertation, one psychotherapy theory that helps to make sense of P4's mental noise is called Internal Family System (IFS). IFS proposes that within each person lies inner fragments, or aspects of the self (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2019). P4 is describing his musician aspect, which has strong opinions about others' music-making (e.g., "oooh, this music style is complete shit"). The "musician's" opinions appear in the form of thoughts. The internal conversation between P4's aspects kept P4 from being able to tune in.

To make matters more interesting, some of P4's mental noise is also an example of critical reflexivity. P4 has enough self-awareness that he's able to recognize his mental voices, and question them (e.g., "Why do you judge?" "Why am I so annoyed about such a little thing?"). The above excerpt shows P4's mental noise but also his self-awareness, and a critical reflexivity in which he questions his own thinking.

I find it interesting that three participants in P4's dialogue referred to him as someone who is "not here." When I asked P6 what he learned about those in the group, if anything, he replied: "P4 is very cerebral [laughter]. He is in his head. I told the joke and he didn't even get it. I was like, 'Okay, you're just not there.'" Here we see P6 noticing P4's lack of presence given the fact that he didn't get P6's joke, which P6 interprets as lack of attention.

P4 recognized: "I was a bit too much in my mind…And in those moments, when I am a bit too much here [signals mind], I cannot be completely here [signals heart]." When P4 signals his heart, he implies his ability to feel. A dialogic moment is an emotional/feeling-based moment. Improvisation is also an emotional/feeling-based moment.

113

P4 told me he didn't remember feeling anything while telling his story. P4's testimony is important because it suggests that the act of being 'too much in the mind,' may block feelings. Zak (2013) actually claims that being overly rational, which he defines as constantly relying on abstract ideas without considering feelings, can shut off oxytocin releases in the body. The data suggests that mental noise may block dialogic moments, which are feeling based.

What is evidenced by P1, P2, P3, and P4's testimonies is that mental noise made it more difficult for them to listen and feel. Furthermore, they described the mental noise as uncomfortable. The last pattern that emerged in the no-connection category was cautiousness. These individuals either did not want connection, or were being cautious in the selection of the story and its details. I will explain this theme below.

Cautiousness

P1 first brought a sense of cautiousness when he claimed having "self-monitoring thoughts like crazy," during the telling of his story. He didn't offer more information on this topic. P2, however, offered an example of her own self-monitoring:

> I was going to tell a story about this guy P18 knew that I dated. But then I thought, "oh, no, that's not—you don't want to tell that story because…. you have your face needs."…. Being likable is one of them. That's the big one that was playing [in my mind]. I have this impression about myself that I'm likable. In order to preserve that image with P18, I was like, "Oh, don't tell that story. That's complicated."

In this excerpt, we see P2 being self-reflective during the dialogue. She showed an awareness of the belief ("I'm a likeable person") that drives her actions ('so don't tell that story'). We also see P2 selecting a story she thought would maintain her likeable image in front of P18. What happened afterwards is that neither P17 or P18 felt a heartfelt

connection during P2's story. P18 told me he was in fact confused by P2's story: "I had

lingering questions…. I know a little bit about her background…. but I didn't know. I didn't

know if there was more there to it." In this excerpt, we see P18 not fully understanding the

context of P2's story.

P18's 'lingering questions' contradict Baxter and DeGooyer's (2001) "Deep Talk"

findings, in which listeners perceive a moment as beautiful when the speaker opens their

soul and expresses innermost thoughts (i.e., deep talk). P18's testimony suggests that P2's

cautiousness appears to have the opposite effect of Deep Talk, or what I call "personal

details in the story." P2 and P18's testimonies suggest that cautious sharing may confuse

listeners, and alienate speakers.

Although P4 did not report self-monitoring thoughts, some of his listeners were also

left with lingering questions. P6 explained:

> I didn't get the feeling that I really got to know a lot about him…. Because he talked
>
> about that [feeling seen]. It's really important for him to be seen. He had this part as
>
> well in his story, right? And I would have enjoyed hearing the story of "why?" Then
>
> he would open up! He would have opened up as to why he wants to be seen.
>
> Because there's a story behind that.

In the above excerpt we see P6 narrating she "didn't get to know a lot about" P4,

suggesting that P4 may have been cautious in his narration. Her testimony suggests that

cautious sharing makes it difficult for a heartfelt connection to emerge on the listener's end.

As I explained in Chapter 4, performative inquiry happens not only when the self

performs, but also when we listen to another's performance—what performance scholars

call the empathic body (Pelias, 2018). If listeners are not particularly moved by someone's

improvisation, it could be a reflection of the artist's emotional state during their

improvisation. In the excerpt below, we will see that P6's description of P4 ("he was in his mind") matches P4's description of himself ("I was a bit too much in my mind"). P6 didn't feel anything during P4's story, and P4 didn't feel anything while he told his story, as he confirmed in our interview. Here is P6's experience of P4's story:

> When P4 was telling his story, he was in his mind more than in his body. I could sense that. But when I was listening to P10, she was totally in her body. And I can sense the difference, you know? And it's not a judgment. Absolutely not. But I think the space [The Flow Technique] allows people to open up…. It just creates something really special that people start to open up and maybe even reveal some things they wouldn't without that [The Flow Technique].

I want to point out two things from this excerpt. The first is that P6, without knowing, is speaking to the idea of performative inquiry through the empathic body—feeling while watching another's performance as a way of knowing. P6 explained sensing that P10 was in her body and P4 was in his mind. By this, P6 suggests that P10's story made her feel something, and P4's didn't. I think the fact that P6's experience of P4's story (i.e., no feelings) matches P4's claims that he did not feel anything during the telling of his story validates the empathic body as a way of knowing another.

I also want to bring to the reader's attention the line "people start to open up and reveal things they wouldn't without that [The Flow Technique]." P6's testimony provides further evidence that fusing improvisation with dialogue, in the context of a safe and trustful space, opens self-disclosure in ways that talk alone may not. P6's testimony is important because it also suggests that, when a person is being cautious during The Flow Technique, it sticks out like a sore thumb.

116

P5, for example, dropped out of the study after the dialogue, and did not share an interview. Neither P8 or P9 felt connected to P5 or enjoyed his story. P8 explained that P5 "was very protective of the people in his story." I noticed this too; he did not reveal any names which, although completely understandable, didn't help me personally enter his story. It also signaled a potential lack of trust toward the group, which P8 picked up as a sign of cautiousness that made her feel disconnected toward P5.

P2 perceived P3 as cautious: "It [her story] did not envelop me, like this kind of rich world that I could see happening. I had a feeling, ugh. P3 started sharing very cautiously…. She was holding back in sharing." In this excerpt, we see P2 perceiving P3 as cautious since the details P3 provided did not envelop P2 in a "rich world." P3's story had the opposite effect of other participants' stories, in which listeners were transported to the stories by the many personal details they provided.

When I asked P3 why she thought a deep, strong heartfelt connection didn't happen with the people in the space, she offered: "I probably tend to be... to hold myself a little guarded." By this, P3 suggests she was sharing cautiously. When I mentioned connection, she replied: "No, it [connection] didn't cross my mind." Here we see P3 being guarded and not intending to connect with other dialogue participants. Participants' testimonies provide evidence that when the speaker is sharing cautiously, it makes it difficult for the listener to feel a deep heartfelt connection with that person.

Although cautiousness is a valid and justified self-protection mechanism, it may also close the door to dialogic moments. In this way, cautiousness has the opposite effect of deep talk (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001), or what in this study I call "personal details in the story." We feel like we are protecting ourselves from hurt but actually, we are barring ourselves from connection.

Those in the mutual connection category—that in which both members of the dyad felt a heartfelt connection while listening to each other's stories—provided rich details that revealed innermost thoughts and feelings. This type of communication may be a strong invitation for another to see an unusual part of the self, which may transcend perceptions of difference, and facilitate aesthetic love. P11 told me during our interview that, before the dialogue, he thought to himself: "I have to open myself up in this way." By this, P11 meant he wanted to send strong signals for others to truly see him by "opening up." We see P11 moving from cautiousness to openness. Yet, for what I'm sure are valid reasons, not everyone is ready to 'open up,' and invite others to see unusual aspects of the self.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings to RQ2, which is divided into two parts. First: "In which moments, if any, did the listener feel a heartfelt connection with another participant during the dialogue?" Second: "What did participants describe experiencing that made it more difficult for dialogic moments to emerge during the Flow Technique?"

Findings indicate that the heartfelt connection happened during moments of emotional convergence. The listener heard a story that resembled an experience from his/her/their past. The listener perceived understanding, at a visceral level, how the speaker felt since the dyad had been in matching emotional states under a similar situation. The emotional convergence sparked a dialogic moment on the listener's end.

Some dyads experienced a mutual connection while other dyads experienced a one-sided connection. The difference between the one-sided and some of the mutual-connection dyads was that the latter had an already established friendship, at least one of them displayed gestures of care and liking during the dialogue, and both members of the dyad shared rich

personal details in their stories, which moved the listener. Yet, all three of these characteristics don't have to be present for dyads to experience a mutual connection.

Four participants claimed to not have experienced any dialogic moments. They described an uncontrolled mental noise that made it difficult for them to speak, listen, and receive. These four participants also showed signs of cautiousness. Some listeners had lingering questions, or didn't feel the stories. The mental noise and cautiousness made it difficult for dialogic moments to emerge both on the speaker's and the listener's end.

In the next chapter, I discuss how the Flow Technique invites relational outcomes that emerged through the fusion of music-making, storytelling and dialogue.

CHAPTER 8

RELATIONAL OUTCOMES VIA THE FLOW TECHNIQUE

This chapter presents findings related to the third and last research question: "What relational outcomes does the Flow Technique invite?" The previous chapters offered findings that advance our theoretical notion of trust and dialogue. This chapter offers practical findings that show the relational outcomes that happen through the fusion of music-making, storytelling, and dialogue. In this chapter, I will explain how the meeting of these elements invited invitational reflexivity and relationality (i.e., an appreciation for other participants and inviting-accepting cycles post-dialogue).

Invitational Reflexivity

Invitational reflexivity refers to the act of taking all the voices in a team into account, especially before decision-making (Barge, 2004). The person who is listening—whether a leader or someone else—creates a space to hear different voices (i.e., visions and values), takes them seriously, and somehow weaves them together into a master story. Invitational reflexivity is tied to the person's ability to connect to the vocabulary and values of the people they work with (Barge, 2004).

Invitational reflexivity happened during one storytelling round in response to the prompt: "Imagine you were a part of your perfect version of [collective's name]. So perfect it feels tailor-made for you. What would one day in this perfect [collective] look like?" There were 67 references across the data of participants showing their values and visions through these stories and learning about other people's values and visions.

The weaving of everyone's story happened through memorization and repetition. Each individual began the story by first repeating what the people beforehand mentioned. Then, the individual added the elements of his perfect day to the collective story. Rachel

explained that: "When you needed to continue the storyline of the person, it felt like I needed to connect to what the person was saying. And then be able to understand."

Below is an example of what invitational reflexivity looked like for Research for Freedom. Charlotte began her perfect day in the research collaborative in the following way:

> We would take a trip outside of Arizona, to Big Sur where the mountains meet the ocean. We would spend the day outside near the beach but also near the trees. We would have it be an opportunity where we can decenter academia from our everyday lives. We would meditate by the ocean. It would consist of a day full of exploration, and exploration outside of academia as well, finding the things that really make us happy, make us laugh, that make us cry.

When Charlotte finished, she passed the handpan to Olivia, who continued:

> A perfect day begins with leaving Tempe and feeling a lot of yearning for green, trees, leafy trees—not prickly cacti—and moving water. Calm. Being able to discuss things beyond academic circles and focus on things that can be done in but also without academia. Meditation. Calm and overall escape.

Here, we see Olivia repeating Charlotte's vision of a perfect day with their collective—spending the day somewhere the water meets the forest, meditating, and "decentering academia." Olivia continued:

> In my perfect version, everyone that wants to be present is present. But there isn't a worry about titles and awards. Page counts, gold stars. Everyone that chooses to be present is discussing research that makes them passionate and why they decided to apply for whatever grad school they went to…. and collaborating on work to make impact instead of recognition.

121

In the above excerpt, we see Olivia embed her values into the story (e.g., make an impact through research). She also shared her vision of a collective that is more interested in impact and less interested in public recognition.

The last person in each group had the task of repeating what everyone else offered. In Research for Equity, Phillip had such a task. This is Phillip's execution of a story that weaved everyone's stories together:

> So, this perfect day for the research collaborative would start in a pub where there are free drinks—IPAs, lagers, margaritas, vodka. It's free flowing. Also, non-alcoholic drinks for those who don't want to drink alcohol. There are sweet potatoes, meat, barbecues, salsa, chips, you name it. And salad…. There's no hierarchy, no competition. Everyone's valid. There is no need to perform, to improve ourselves, to make ourselves bigger than we really are. There is play, there's no professionalism.

Here we see Phillip acknowledging Tess's vision of a horizontal space between professors and students, no performance, and conversation over food and drinks. He continued:

> We just speak as mentors and mentees with, again, no hierarchy. We talk about research that tickles us. Epistemologies that are shared. We go out into the community, we identify the needs of that community, we come to that community with a sense of humility. Not like we're there to help them, or save, or teach them, but that it goes the other way around. We are the ones who have something to learn from them. We identify the needs of the elderly, the indigenous folks, those who experience poverty. We listen.

122

In the above excerpt, we see Phillip again repeating Tess's vision (i.e., working as a group with a marginalized community) and values (i.e., humility and a shift to learn from an outside group as opposed to teach or help them). He continued:

> We figure out how academia can be of service, not just for publishing. It's not easy, especially given the pressures of publishing, jobs to keep to pay the bills, and yet we affirm that we are there for each other and we figure it out together.

Here we see Phillip embed his own value and vision. He wants to do academic research in service to the community and "not just for publishing." He embeds his own value of group support (i.e., "we are there for each other, and we figure it out together"). He continued:

> After this happy hour, and grounding our research in a community, affirming that knowledge is shared and not of anyone's own, we go out to a natural spot, the forest to see the moonlight beaming through. We talk about things beyond our research. What makes us human. We connect at a deeper level. We see each other as more than researchers; we see each other as human beings.

In the above excerpt, Phillip included my vision: time immersed in nature as a collective, sharing stories at night, and connecting deeply. He ended the story in this way:

> We end it [the day] with a hug, realizing that hopefully we are continuing the knowledge building of those who came before us to this land, and we imagine how we could use research to build worlds for those who will come afterwards.

Here, we see Phillip's vision to build knowledge on top of the knowledge already found by elders, and do research that has future generations in mind.

Kat, who like Phillip was the last person to weave a story, explained her weaving experience during our interview:

You learn about the person and what matters to them. And so, I was so happy, in a way, that I was the last one [to repeat what everyone said] because I was able to really pay attention to what each and everybody was saying and how. . . sort of take a little bit of what's important to them.

In the above excerpt, we see Kat noticing "what matters" to the people in that space. Phillip and Olivia agreed. When I asked Phillip during our interview what he learned about his fellow participants (if anything), he said: "I learned that Tess really does love parties and beer." When I asked Olivia the same question during our interview, she replied: "I felt they really wanted to get out of where they were. Space was very important to them…. I learned that a change of space is what they need."

The stories and participants' perceptions of those stories suggest that the prompt effectively invited stories that sincerely showcased "what matters" to participants. When Kat said "I was so happy in a way that I was the last one because I was able to really pay attention," she suggests, like Rachel, that the instruction to memorize, repeat, and "continue with the storyline" facilitated invitational reflexivity.

The weaving of a new collective story is not a minor outcome. Stories position people in scripts that they later act out (Barge, 2004). Stories create identities (Tannen, 2007), actions (Barge, 2004), and even unfulfilling relationships (with a high story convergence) (Pearce, 1999). The weaving of a new story can set the conditions for new actions (Barge, 2004).

So far, I've summarized the way in which one of the prompts (i.e., "What would one day in your perfect collective look like?") invited honest visions and values related to the collective in question. Participants played the game of memorizing and repeating other people's vision/values and then weaving those visions/values with theirs. In this process,

participants learned insights about "what matters" to their teammates. Furthermore, the weaving of a collective story using the Flow Technique relates to three distinct aspects of invitational reflexivity (a) a spirit of inclusivity, (b) valuing another's contribution, and (c) reflexivity.

The first aspect of invitational reflexivity that emerged from the data is a spirit of inclusivity. A few participants explained that the Flow Technique reminded them of indigenous practices given its spirit to include everyone's voice. In the excerpt below, Alec explained that the Flow Technique reminded them specifically of indigenous storytelling:

> To be honest, the first thing that I thought of [when comparing the Flow Technique to another experience] was indigenous practices where people have a bunch of different instruments, not just one person with an instrument, and everyone is watching. Maybe other people have instruments. Maybe there's dancing involved. More so collaborative storytelling than just a singular person playing one instrument, and everyone else is listening.

The Flow Technique resembles indigenous storytelling practices (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2017) in the sense that the dialogue shows the local values of the people in that community, and those values are often more spiritual in nature (e.g., human connection) than capitalist (e.g., creating results by a certain day). However, what Alec described in the above excerpt is the spirit behind invitational reflexivity: a space for "more collaborative storytelling than just a singular person playing one instrument." Alec is contrasting indigenous values (i.e., "collaborative storytelling") to Western values (i.e., "a singular person playing one instrument"), especially Western managerial practices in which one person makes decisions for an entire group without inviting other voices. Alec's testimony suggests they felt invited to contribute to the group.

125

The literature suggests that leaders benefit from extending this type of invitational reflexivity because they stop carrying the sole responsibility, and physical stress, to provide the only guiding vision for the company (Glaser, 2016). Invitational reflexivity can also make the system more welcoming of whomever and whatever shows up (Oliver & Fitzgerald, 2013). In this way, invitational reflexivity addresses power issues in which one person, typically the leader, imposes a story over others to control their behavior (Barge, 2004; Smith & Keyton, 2001). When managers don't extend the invitation to hear others' values and visions, then they are taking a stance of "absolute power" (Barge, 2004, p. 84).

Not only is Alec contrasting indigenous and Western values, but they also are alluding to *kani ka pila*—a Hawaiian term for an informal jam session. Kani ka pila captures the spirit of invitational reflexivity. I first came across the term in my time at the East West Center, a research center located in Honolulu, HI. Each Wednesday, the center would organize a conference for its associates, and I was one of them. The topics were related to the land and culture of Hawaii.

One night, I was asked to perform music before the conference to introduce that night's speaker, a musician. I will never forget this man—his charisma and love for music lit the room. He introduced me to kani ka pila, which in Hawaiian means "let the instrument sound." Kani ka pila is an informal gathering where everyone lets an instrument sound (Espaniola, 2017). Everyone has to create music with whatever resource they have at their disposal—singing, whistling, a ukulele, spoons, anything!—to contribute to the jam session.

Kani ka pila excludes the formality of Western music and reflects the relaxed island living (Espaniola, 2017). There is simplicity in not trying to perform or sound good but, rather, let the instrument sound. Careful listening is key in making kani ka pila fun. To me, the spirit of kani ka pila is "let's play together. I want to hear how your music and mine

combine." I believe kani ka pila and invitational reflexivity share the same spirit of inclusivity, collective joy, and careful listening.

I want to continue highlighting the aspects of invitational reflexivity that emerged from the data using kani ka pila as a metaphor for invitational reflexivity. The first aspect of kani ka pila is, of course, the invitation for others to play (i.e., inclusivity). Lea explained that the Flow Technique quite literally invited everyone's voice.

Figure 11

Lea's Metaphor of Speaking while Playing the Handpan: Talking Stick Circle
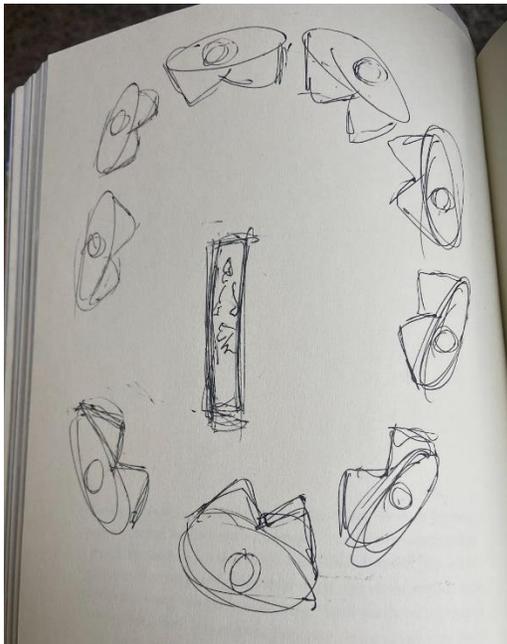
Lea compared her Flow Technique experience to that of being in "a village" and sitting in a circle with a talking stick in the middle. Talking sticks are used by indigenous communities in Africa, New Zealand, and the United States. She explained: "A talking stick gives everyone in the circle an opportunity to be heard. It represents a village, a community…and there's no room for your mind to wander."

In the excerpt above, we see Lea comparing a village to a space that "gives everyone an opportunity to be heard." Lea's testimony suggests that inviting and taking everyone's voice seriously (i.e., invitational reflexivity) creates a sense of community. Her line—"there is no room for your mind to wander"—suggests that people's values and visions landed on attentive ears. Lea and Alec's testimonies suggest that the invitational reflexivity that happened through the fusion of music-making, storytelling, and dialogue (i.e., the Flow Technique) appeared to have enhanced the feeling of community.

During the dialogues, I observed participants nod when someone else in the group repeated what they said. Julia, for example, weaved into her story the first element Zoe mentioned in her perfect day—having smaller group gatherings. Zoe nodded when she heard Julia repeat this. Zoe's eyes also met mine in that moment. She smiled and giggled. I got the feeling she felt acknowledged by Julia. Later in our interview, Zoe admitted that she did. Her testimony suggests that invitational reflexivity can also promote a sense of acknowledgment (i.e., feeling recognized by another).

The second aspect of invitational reflexivity evidenced in the data, and drawing on kani ka pila as a metaphor, is how members appreciated others' contributions. Indeed, invitational reflexivity requires a stance of perceiving those in the group as having a contribution to make (Barge, 2004). During the Wild Yoga dialogue, I asked participants what was on their mind after the "perfect yoga studio" storytelling round. Lea mentioned Ella's reference to help children. Emilia then replied: "That was cool because it kind of brought the essence of that person out, and it made you appreciate that individual person with what they're offering into the space."

In the above excerpt, we see Emilia appreciating how the use of the Flow Technique to answer the imaginative prompt brought the person's "essence," which in Ella appeared as

a desire to help children through yoga. We also see Emilia appreciating the person's vision/values, or "what they're offering into the space."

In our interview, Emilia elaborated on her appreciation for the visions/values/and ideas others had to offer:

> They [Lea and Ella] would just say, it wasn't even a cool concept, it was that they took something subtle and made it bigger. "Oh, they said something" and that created something in me. And it was at that moment I felt like "that's how wonderful co-creation can be." We feed off of one another and the energy and the ideas. It's not this competing type of atmosphere. It's like, "what you can offer only elevates what I can offer. And what I offer then elevates what you can offer even higher."

In the above excerpt, we see Emilia describing how the three of them elevated each other's ideas "even higher." Emilia's testimony is important because it provides evidence that the Flow Technique is facilitating an appreciation for collaboration. The findings suggest that an appreciation for collaboration is linked to perceiving others' contributions as valuable.

Ella explained she felt "pumped and excited" to open a yoga studio. The technique allowed her to see what each person could contribute to it: "We all have these different gifts and talents. So of course, my little mind is thinking: 'Well, Emilia could do this, and Lea could do this.' So that just inspired lots of other thoughts within me."

Here, we see Ella explaining how she became highly aware of Emilia and Lea's gifts and how the three could create a yoga studio together. Emilia and Ella's testimony suggests that the Flow Technique is inviting both an appreciation of others' voices, and an appreciation for collaboration.

During the dialogue, Ana alluded to a shift in perception of which she was now more aware—the value of inviting everyone's voice for collective story making. After we weaved our perfect day, I asked Luke and Ana what was on their minds. Ana shared:

I see more the value of collaborative story making, sensemaking, knowledge building. You know how academia research values are like "Oh, single author," you do your research on your own. I think there's just more in the collective knowledge building. There is more there.

In the above excerpt, we see Ana expressing an increased awareness of the value of collective knowledge building. Her testimony suggests a shift of perspective in which she values collective knowledge building more than single authorship (i.e., "there is more there"). Ana articulated, in her way, Emilia's idea: "what you can offer only elevates what I can offer. And what I offer then elevates what you can offer even higher." Ana's testimony provides evidence the Flow Technique is inviting an appreciation of others' voices, an element of invitational reflexivity.

Ella brought up an excellent point during our interview: some people are naturally shy, and don't like to speak up. She mentioned the Flow Technique could be especially useful for them: "What I like about the handpan is that it makes people feel a lot more comfortable in sharing what they want to share…even for the quieter people. It might be what they need to express themselves."

In the above excerpt, Ella suggested the Flow Technique would facilitate expression, especially across quieter individuals who have valuable things to say but may keep that information to themselves. Zoe is an example of a "quieter" person whose contributions were appreciated by others. In our interview, Zac told me Zoe is typically a "reserved" person. In fact, both Zac and Frank perceived Zoe as hesitant to speak when the dialogue

began. They noted that, as the dialogue evolved, Zoe felt much more comfortable expressing herself. "I noticed that toward the end, she [Zoe] wanted to tell her stories more. She was more excited to engage and be like, 'I'm gonna tell my story, however long it takes,'" explained Zac. Zac's testimony suggests that the Flow Technique facilitates self-expression in people who are shy. As Ella said, "It might be what they need to express themselves."

During the imaginative prompt (i.e., "What would one day in your perfect collective look like?"), Zoe mentioned a desire to see less whiteness. She didn't phrase this as a critique against whiteness but as a desire to know other types of voices, knowledge, and actions. This is an excerpt from her perfect day in the research collaborative:

I hope to see projects that involve a kind of talk that is less white. I say less white because sometimes I feel like that space [the research collaborative] for me feels a bit white. Seriously, I don't know how to explain it. I'm not getting the right words to do that. But I learned this term in class "dewhiteness," somehow, of the space. Make it more inclusive. And not just inclusive with words but actions.

In the above excerpt, we see Zoe disclosing that she perceives the collective to be not as inclusive as it could be. Her story suggests that the fusion of music-making, storytelling, and dialogue (i.e., the Flow Technique) creates an expression of honest visions and desires for a collective, even among shy individuals. The silence in the room was deep when Zoe finished her story. Frank, her white male colleague, was up next: "I like the vibes of the situation we created here. We got late starts of the day, natural flow of our bodies."

Here we see Frank repeating Zac's perfect day in the collective—starting the day late. He continued:

We're also working together as one team in a community or in an organization that

we want to help, especially an organization that has some sort of difficulty, something they need to overcome…. And also makes sense for that community, like Rachel was talking about, in regards to the decolonization, de-whiteness, bringing everything to a more harmonious situation…. Then, we get to celebrate together afterward. But we gotta work. We are doing work.

Here, we see Frank repeat two of Zoe's visions. First, to work as a team with an outside organization and to help them overcome a problem. Second, to make that organization less white; although, that's not quite what Zoe said. We also see Frank acknowledge another of Zac's visions: more time spent together, as a collective, in celebration. When Frank said "but we gotta work. We are doing work," he is emphasizing how he too, like Zoe, wants to work with an outside organization.

The above excerpt shows what invitational reflexivity can look like through the use of the Flow Technique. The fact that participants are speaking with "no guards at the gate" but rather from a state of relaxed presence helped to bring about honest desires for the collective, as shown above. The study's data suggests that the Flow Technique invited honest visions and values to emerge during the imaginative prompt, even across shy individuals.

The third element of invitational reflexivity that the Flow Technique invited was reflexivity. Luke, for example, mentioned in our interview that a few of Rachel's contributions made him reflect on his actions (or lack thereof) in relation to Rachel. "Here she is [Rachel] in my country, and I'm like 'Am I doing enough to be welcoming? Am I implicated in this [her loneliness] in some way?'"

Luke's reflection moved me, especially as a foreigner who understands the inevitable loneliness Rachel experienced by moving to a foreign country. Perhaps more pertinent to this dissertation is that, in the above excerpt, we see Luke reflecting on himself as a result of

132

hearing Rachel's stories. We see critical reflexivity yet again as Luke questions his behaviors in relation to Rachel. Luke's testimony suggests that the act of considering all the voices in the group can facilitate reflexivity, which is a principle of dialogic organizational development (OD) philosophy.

Luke told me he reflected on himself and the dialogue after the dialogue. Other participants did the same. Others told me they didn't reflect at all, except during and because of the interview. This evidence suggests that accompanying the Flow Technique with a follow-up conversation specifically to promote critical reflexivity would be beneficial for participants.

The invitational reflexivity that happened during the Flow Technique was relaxing and informal—kani ka pila style. This relaxing space contributed to the honesty with which participants shared values and visions. The Blue Square wanted smaller gatherings with fewer teachings and more dancing, singing, cooking, and overall enjoying life with like-minded folks. Research for Freedom was desperate to stop studying organizations and start working with organizations. Research for Equity wanted more conversation between professors and doctoral students outside of school, with food and drinks. Wild Yoga wanted a very clean studio that made yoga accessible to diverse populations. Across collectives, people wanted to connect with colleagues in a heartfelt way. They also wanted their work to be appreciated, recognized, and clearly enjoyed by the people they serve. I enjoyed how Phillip summarized his experience of invitational reflexivity once the dialogue ended: "I've learned so much about myself and about other people." Most people listened attentively—kani ka pila style.

In summary, the dialogue invited invitational reflexivity by positioning each participant to express their perfect day in the collective in question. Others listened and, at times, repeated others' stories in combination with their own. Several participants mentioned

they learned through the exercise "what matters" to the people in the space and "what they need." The exercise relates to three specific characteristics of invitational reflexivity: (a) a spirit of inclusivity, (b) an appreciation for others' visions/values/ideas, and (c) self-reflection prompted by listening to others' visions/values. The Flow Technique invited one more relational outcome: relationality.

Relationality

The theme of relationality, which participants at times referred to as a feeling of group "connectedness," was a consistent theme across interviews, dialogues, drawings, and my field notes. Based on the data, I'm conceptualizing relationality as (a) an appreciation for the interactions that occurred during the dialogue/the people in that dialogue and (b) inviting-accepting cycles post-dialogue. First, I will describe the theme of appreciation, which had 42 mentions across the data.

When I asked Charlotte what she learned about herself because of the experience, if anything, she told me she felt inspired to make more space for community:

The experience that you had us do made me want to change how I live, how I do my research, and how I write. It reminded me that "oh yeah, it is community that is important. Sometimes maybe the meaning of life is just sitting in the grass somewhere, telling stories to each other."… So yeah, it made me want to change or at least alter some of the ways that I'm doing things because it reminded me that this [community] is important.

In the excerpt above, we see Charlotte wanting to alter her lifestyle to make more space for group interactions. The experience inspired her. The experience also reminded her that a simple moment with people, like sitting on the grass telling stories, can be a meaningful moment. A meaningful life, then, can be a collection of simple (yet meaningful)

134

moments in the company of others. This is important to the study at hand because it suggests the Flow Technique is creating an appreciation for group interactions, as well as deep reflections on the role of simple interpersonal moments in a meaningful life.

One possible explanation as to why participants left the space with an appreciation for community is because of the dialogic moments that emerged. In the excerpt below, Ron explained that he was reminded of the value of connection by experiencing heartfelt connection:

It seems that human connection can be as equally fueling for our souls as doing something like yoga or a drug…. We were reminded of the importance of those experiences [connection] by connecting with other people. So, by connecting with other people that we're not necessarily close with—we are just colleagues for the most part—we're able to unlock some of the deeper memories of the importance of human connection.

Here, we see Ron appreciating connection as an experience that "fuels the soul." He was reminded of the importance of positive human interactions by experiencing heartfelt connections with colleagues. His testimony suggests that the dialogic moments contributed to an appreciation for the interactions that occurred.

When I asked Kit what they learned about Pam and Emilia, if anything, they replied "that they are beautiful." Jack mentioned:

I have an appreciation for all of them as individuals more than I did before. It's not something that comes naturally for people that you just met. It takes building a relationship…knowing each other better. We skipped all those protocols.

Kit and Jack's testimony provide evidence that the Flow Technique cultivated an appreciation for those who engaged in the dialogue, even across participants who had just

met. I empathize with the feeling they described. When I joined the dialogue as a participant, I saw a side of my colleagues I had not seen before. I walked away with a deeper knowledge and a deeper appreciation of who they were.

The appreciation participants claimed to feel for one another as a result of the dialogue may help explain the next theme: inviting-accepting cycles. In the rest of this chapter, I will explain the ways in which participants extended/accepted invitations for prolonged interaction once the dialogue ended. I will close the chapter by explaining why relationality, conceptualized as (a) an appreciation for the interactions/people in the space and (b) inviting-accepting cycles, may contribute to the flourishing of a collective.

Inviting-Accepting Cycles

The term inviting-accepting cycle (Montague, 2012) refers to the extending of an invitation to interact through nonverbal (e.g., eye contact, smile) and verbal communication (e.g., friendly salutations, inquiries about one's life). The other person accepts the invitation by reciprocating through an open expression (e.g., an acceptance, a question, or a self-disclosure in response to the other's inquiry). People make space for dialogue by engaging in inviting-accepting cycles throughout the course of their relationship (Montague, 2012).

Participants engaged in inviting-accepting cycles outside our meeting with at least one participant who was in the meeting. If they didn't interact immediately after, the participant expressed a desire to get together or start a conversation with that person the next time they met. It's possible that the appreciation, trust, and heartfelt connections that emerged during the dialogue led to these inviting-accepting cycles.

The first instance of an inviting-accepting cycle emerged at the end of dialogue one. Zoe mentioned she was hungry, to which Julia replied "me too! Let's get lunch!" In this example, Julia is extending an invitation to continue interacting with Zoe (i.e., "let's get

lunch!"). Once the dialogue ended and people stood up, Julia mentioned again that she was

hungry. Ron suggested lunch. Four people accepted the invitation. The group began

exchanging phone numbers and suggesting restaurants. Everyone, except for two people

who already had plans, went out for lunch after the dialogue. The group lunch was not on

anyone's agenda prior to our meeting.

The Blue Square participants were attending a 4-day workshop in Hawaii. They had

to meet at the same location on a daily basis for the workshop. Our dialogue occurred on

day one. I also attended the workshop as a participant. As the workshop unfolded, I

noticed—to my surprise—that the six people who engaged in the first dialogue were in close

proximity throughout the rest of the workshop. They talked during breaks. They sat next to

each other at the workshop. They went out for drinks or dinner. "For me, it [the dialogue]

was the reason why I sat together with Julia and Kat afterwards," explained Pam. "We met

two times [outside the workshop] and had a good time. It started with that thing [the

dialogue]." In this excerpt, Pam explained that she continued hanging out with Julia and Kat

because of the dialogue. Pam's testimony provides evidence that the Flow Technique invites

inviting-accepting cycles after the dialogue. Inviting-accepting cycles can deepen a

relationship and cultivate the trust needed to later engage in private dialogue (Montague,

2012).

When I asked Zoe if she'd be open to having a heart-to-heart conversation with any

of the dialogue participants, she replied:

I kind of already had. Julia came, I think it was day two. She came in and said

something about how she had this realization about herself.… I said "me too. I

realized that about myself a long time ago".… And that was that. I was actually

thinking about talking to Kat and seeing what she talks with her husband about all

this. Phillip shared some of his stuff with me. He had some kind of eye-opening experience. And then we were talking with Kat, and we were all three of us. We've already had [heart-to-heart conversations after the dialogue].

In the above excerpt, we see Zoe narrating how the inviting-accepting cycles emerged with Julia, Kat, and Phillip. Julia extended an invitation to Zoe by telling her a self-realization. Zoe accepted the invitation to interact by disclosing something in return ("I said 'me too. I realized that about myself a long time ago'"). This is an example of Julia and Zoe already engaging in what Montague (2012) conceptualizes as dialogue (i.e., one person reveals something personal and intimate while the other receives it with acceptance).

Phillip extended an invitation to Zoe by disclosing his self-realization. Again, it appears that Zoe and Phillip were already engaging in dyadic dialogue outside the meeting. Zoe wanted to invite Kat to an interaction by asking her a question about her husband. This data suggests that participants were extending/accepting invitations outside our dialogue.

Kat told me she was messaging some dialogue participants (Julia and Pam) hours after the dialogue. She explained: "I belong in that group. They are my peeps. They are my people. I was messaging them last night. Yes, now we're a thing," Kat concluded. Here, we see Kat showing a strong feeling of belonging to the small group of dialogue participants. Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973) would suggest that Kat felt a strong group membership because of communication convergence (i.e., sharing stories of office parties where people said nice things). Yet, the dialogic moments may have inspired her to accept/extend invitations for prolonged interaction that, according to Montague (2012), would deepen her relationship with those individuals.

138

In one of the dialogues, people did not engage in accepting-inviting cycles after the meeting. Yet, Alec and Ana told me during our interview that they want to start a conversation in the future. Ana explained:

> I want to know them a little more. Of course, I can now. I think it [the Flow Technique] created some connection or some point that now I can stop and ask "how are you? How is this [topic] going?" I have something to talk to them about.

In the excerpt above, we see Ana implying that she couldn't talk to Jack and Alec before the dialogue because she did not know them or did not have a topic of conversation. Ana's testimony suggests that the Flow Technique facilitates conversational openings because now participants have "something to talk about." Alec felt the same way about extending invitations to Ana:

> I learned who Ana was [laughter]. I learned about her struggles. I learned there are a lot of the things that she was kind of going through. Even though we only have like four more weeks left in the semester, I think the perception I have of her has definitely shifted to the point where, if I see her, I'll make more of an effort to say "Oh, hey, Ana, how's it going?" Cause before, I was just like, "I don't know who you are."

In the excerpt above, we see Alec matching Ana's sentiment: "now we have something to talk about because we know each other." Alec's perception of Ana changed from "I don't know you" to "I learned who Ana was." Alec's testimony provides evidence that the Flow Technique invites conversational openings, or inviting-accepting cycles, by creating a change of perception from "I don't know you" to "I know you." In Ana's case, it was a change of perception from "we have nothing to talk about" to "we have something to talk about." Alec and Ana's testimony is important because it suggests that, by positioning

139

people in heartfelt dialogue, participants may be more likely to talk to one another afterward. In other words, the Flow Technique may stimulate conversations—a goal of OD. We see, again, the Flow Technique inviting a behavior aligned with OD philosophies.

The only group that didn't experience inviting-accepting cycles was group two—the group with no dialogic moments. "I really wondered if the interactions with Olivia and Frank would shift after the group experience. I don't think they did to any mentionable extent. I remember feeling a bit down about it," explained Charlotte. She told me she even invited Olivia out for lunch, but Olivia was too busy. By declining Charlotte's invitation, Olivia decreased the possibility for dialogue, dialogic moments, and a deeper relationship with Charlotte (Montague, 2012).

There may be unspoken reasons as to why group two did not experience inviting-accepting cycles, such as busy agendas or previous commitments. Yet, Charlotte's testimony suggests that dialogic moments may be acting as a springboard for inviting-accepting cycles. This is important to the study at hand because, if a collective wants to stimulate conversations and invite relationality across its members, the collective may need to consider crafting events that set the conditions for heartfelt connection.

Kat phrased it in the following way:

In order to feel the way that I feel towards them today, normally it takes time, right? To know people, to trust them. We skipped all of that. There were no months or years of sharing stories. We just skipped right to the part where "you know what? I know you. I see you. I trust you."

In the above excerpt, Kat acknowledged that cultivating trust takes time. Yet, she suggests "they skipped all of that" and jumped straight into trust (i.e., "I trust you") and a

change of perception (i.e., "I know you") by engaging in a dialogue that featured the Flow Technique. She continued:

> I feel like this [The Flow Technique] is a fantastic exercise to get people to see each other, to create that compassion, that safe space, that trust without necessarily having those people becoming best friends…. It just makes whatever it is that you have to do with them much easier. And so fast, too! Instead of having people get together for coffee and pizza, just have them do this [The Flow Technique]. You'll see how it will transform the relationship.

In the above excerpt, we see Kat linking Buber's (1958) concept of mutuality ("get people to see each other") with trust ("to create…that trust.") Kat's testimony suggests that, if collectives want to promote relationality, they may need to craft dialogues in which participants are witnessing deep aspects of the other and heartfelt connections emerge.

Second, Kat mentioned, "you'll see how it [the Flow Technique] will transform the relationship." Dialogic moments are supposed to be transformative at an individual (Poulos, 2008) and dyadic level (Montague, 2012). Based on the findings of this study, the transformation of the relationship may occur through the inviting-accepting cycles and the appreciation for dialogue participants that the Flow Technique invites—what I conceptualize as relationality.

Third, Kat suggested that the Flow Technique facilitates a trust that can help people "do whatever they have to do much easier." Luke agreed. Although he didn't use the word "trust," he thinks "connection" makes it easier for teams to work together. In the excerpt below, we see Luke explaining that an initial connection makes future interactions less threatening:

141

Being able to be vulnerable and open with one another and be able to use that as a

springboard for more connection, be comfortable going up to someone and

proposing an idea or giving a critique, giving them feedback on how they can

improve their work, or whatever it is. All of that can be so much easier, or less

threatening, if you have this grounding experience [the Flow Technique].

In the above excerpt, we see Luke saying what seasoned organizational consultants

have already said: people open up (e.g., "be comfortable going up to someone and proposing

an idea") when they trust that person. In that safe conversational opening, someone can

"provide feedback" or "propose an idea" and feel less threatened by doing so, as Luke

mentioned.

The role of inviting-accepting cycles cannot be underestimated in the cultivation of

trust and relationships. After one of the dialogues, for instance, Zac, Phillip, and Pam stayed

in the room while I cleaned up. Zac said he was on his way to Starbucks. "Can I come with

you?" Phillip asked. "Yeah! That is why I said it with a lingering tone," Zac responded. They

laughed and headed together to Starbucks. Pam was not invited. When I asked Zac about

not inviting Pam, he mentioned how the inviting-accepting cycles he has had throughout his

relationship with Zac, but not Pam, influenced his decision to not explicitly invite Pam. "If

Pam were to do that [extend invitations to Phillip], that might be different," said Phillip

during the interview.

There are other unspoken factors probably coming into play in Phillip's choice to

not invite Pam. Maybe Phillip wanted to talk to Zac privately. Maybe he felt shy about

inviting Pam. Maybe Phillip has preconceived ideas about Pam that kept him from inviting

her. Or perhaps the fact Phillip did not connect with Pam also influenced his choice. What

his above testimony suggests, though, is that receiving invitations to interact motivates the individual to extend future invitations to that person.

After the dialogue, Ron invited Rachel and me for coffee. After their dialogue, the three yoga teachers stayed in the room talking. Kit told me they wanted to get together. "It [the dialogue] inspired me to say 'Okay, let's get together on Sunday now.' It inspired me to take the initiative of like, 'Okay, let's get together. We miss each other. Let's get together now.'"

Kit's testimony provides evidence that inviting-accepting cycles frequently occur after the dialogue, and an appreciation for the dialogue participants (i.e., relationality). This is important since inviting-accepting cycles invite conversational openings. These conversational openings may (or may not) become a space for new language and new meanings to emerge.

The Flow Technique as a Relationship Nurturer

I'd like to offer the metaphor of the Flow Technique as a conversation starter and a relationship nurturer, similar to a fire starter. I wish to explain what a fire starter is by sharing a brief personal story, especially if the reader has never seen a fire starter. When I was camping in Washington State, I tried making a fire, but there were no dead leaves to ignite the fire. Everything was wet. Luckily, the forest rangers came to help us. One of them introduced me to a fire starter; "you can buy them at Walmart," he said. The fire starter was shaped like a block. All he did was light it up with a match. The block lit up effortlessly, and it continued to burn for a couple of hours. We put logs on top of it, and voilà, we had a campfire.

The Flow Technique may be like a fire starter. The technique (i.e., the fire starter) invites relationality (i.e., a campfire) by facilitating (a) an appreciation for the people in the space and (b) post dialogue inviting-accepting cycles.

In Kat's opinion, relationality emerged from a lack of hiding:

You're giving them [participants] a chance, not only to show themselves, but to see each other. So, whatever it is that these people need to do, they will do it better. Because now all of that [hiding] is gone. You see me. You saw me already as I am. There's no more hiding. And I see you…. Now, I know what moves you, and you know what moves me. So, I know how to work with you. I know how to give you what you need to do what you have to do.

In the excerpt above, Kat described her dialogue experience similar to an I/Thou relation— "a chance, not only to show ourselves, but to see each other." We also see Kat describing how the dialogue gave her the knowledge of "what moves" the other and, therefore, what that person needs to produce her best work.

Kat is a project manager whose job is to solve problems and find ways to give her co-workers what they need to work comfortably. I find her testimony particularly insightful, given that she works in a corporate job and in a position of leadership, to understand how the Flow Technique invites a relational outcome that may support flourishing groups. She concluded: "I hope more people get to experience this [the Flow Technique] and that it becomes its own thing. When you need people to work together, let's do this [the Flow Technique]. You need people to get along, let's do this [the Flow Technique]."

Kat and Luke's testimony suggest that, by experiencing heartfelt connection with colleagues and mutual awareness in the context of dialogue, we can work more easily with them. Kat suggests that graceful work arises when we know what a specific individual wants

144

at the deepest level ("no hiding"), and we provide them with what they need. Luke believes graceful work arises from having the trust to come up to a colleague and communicate ideas. They both claim that connection and deep mutual awareness will facilitate graceful work.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings to RQ3: "What relational outcomes does the Flow Technique invite?" Findings indicate the Flow Technique invites invitational reflexivity and relationality (i.e., appreciation for the interactions/people in that space and inviting-accepting cycles post-dialogue). Participants practiced weaving together everyone's vision for the collective into a master story through memorization and repetition. The weaving inspired a sense of community and an appreciation for collaboration. Participants also left the dialogue with an appreciation for the people in that space and an awareness of "what moves" them. They continued to talk after the dialogue or expressed during our interviews a desire to engage in future conversations. Some participants also suggested that the connection and mutual awareness that emerged during the dialogue could set the conditions for graceful work, or as they said, "working more easily together." In summary, the Flow Technique invited two relational outcomes (i.e., invitational reflexivity and relationality) that could potentially promote the flourishing of teams through communication.

CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore participants' experience of a dialogue in which they engaged with the "Flow Technique." The Flow Technique consists of telling different kinds of stories while simultaneously playing the handpan. The dialogue set the conditions for connection.

In the first four chapters of this manuscript, I reviewed relevant literature on three distinct areas: dialogic organizational development (OD), dialogue, and art's contribution to dialogue. The review suggested that OD practices could be even more impact if they include a dialogue that cultivates trust. When people relate to each other in an I/Thou or Person-Centered interaction, safe conversational openings can arise and deep connections may occur. People sometimes experience a special and brief moment of perceived deep, strong, and obvious heartfelt connection (i.e., a dialogic moment) when someone shows an unusual aspect of herself (Montague, 2012); the conversation is perceived as beautiful (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001); or inspiring (Poulos, 2008). Improvisation promotes dialogic moments by opening self-expression (Wagner et al., 2016; Vougioukalou et al., 2019) or bringing about a sense of beauty that inspires people (LeBaron & Alexander, 2020).

After facilitating six dialogues with 20 people across four collectives using the Flow Technique, this investigation (a) studied dialogic moments by (b) juxtaposing four different types of qualitative data (i.e., dialogue, interviews, field notes, and drawings). Previous studies (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001; Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008) analyzed one member of the dyad's perspective on a dialogic moment that potentially happened years ago through one method of knowing (e.g., interviews, autoethnography). This study analyzed a cross-examination of recent experiences.

146

In response to RQ1 (What did participants describe experiencing in and because of the Flow Technique that promoted trust, dialogue, and/or dialogic moments, if anything?), three primary findings emerged: (a) relaxation, (b) play, and (c) presence. Participants described feeling deeply relaxed while telling their stories with the handpan or listening to others' stories/music. They felt little pressure to perform but rather dove into the freedom to explore. Participants played, joked, and laughed. Many participants claimed to immerse themselves in the stories and to listen with an almost empty mind.

In response to RQ2a (In which moments, if any, did the listener feel a heartfelt connection with another participant during the dialogue?), one primary finding emerged: (a) people feel a heartfelt connection during emotional convergence. Across those who felt a dialogic moment, the deep heartfelt connection happened on the listeners' end when the listener perceived knowing the way the speaker felt because they had experienced a similar situation at some point. Emotional convergence refers to a perceived convergence of emotion, on the listener's end, in relation to a shared experience.

In response to RQ2b (What did participants describe experiencing that made it more difficult for dialogic moments to emerge during the Flow Technique?), two primary findings emerged: (a) mental noise and (b) cautiousness. The four participants who experienced no connectivity (i.e., no dialogic moments toward others or from others) experienced a "hurricane" of thoughts, as one participant described it, as they listened. Three claimed to also experience mental noise while telling a story. The noise concerned a critique of their play, or others' play. At times, the thoughts related to self-monitoring. The findings suggest that four participants were protective of the details and stories they chose to reveal. Some listeners claimed having lingering questions after listening to these stories or not learning much about the speaker.

In response to RQ3, (What relational outcomes does the Flow Technique invite?), two primary findings emerged: (a) invitational reflexivity and (b) relationality. Participants shared and listened to each other's values and visions for the collective they belong to. The group also managed to weave everyone's visions into a master story (i.e., invitational reflexivity). Participants also described feeling an appreciation for the people in the space. After the dialogue, some participants either extended/accepted invitations for prolonged interactions with at least one other dialogue participant or claimed a desire to do so in the future. In the next section, I discuss the theoretical implications of the most consequential findings.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study extend previous research in five ways. The study evidences that (a) experiencing relaxation is a component of experiencing trust, (b) dialogic moments emerge in some cases when the listener had an experience that is similar to the speaker's experience, (c) dialogic moments can be one-sided, (d) mental noise and cautiousness can make it difficult for dialogic moments to emerge, and (e) fusing music-making with storytelling contributes to dialogue by facilitating stories that are rich in personal details.

Trust as Relaxation

The feeling of relaxation was one of the most prevalent themes that emerged across the interviews, my field notes, participants' drawings, and the dialogue transcriptions. This study advances our understanding of trust in relation to dialogue (brown, 2021; Cissna & Anderson, 1994; Glaser, 2016; Montague, 2012) by showing that relaxation is a central component to the visceral experience dialogue participants have in moments when they display trustful communicative behaviors (e.g., disclosure of personal details, crying) and claim to feel trust.

When the dialogues ended and I asked participants to leave the rest of us with one word, participants often summarized their experience by saying "peace, rest, contentment," which suggests a theme of calmness. A few participants said they felt as if they'd just finished a yoga class. During our interviews, several participants compared their dialogue experience to sitting next to the ocean or in a boat rocked by waves. "It was just a very relaxing experience. The contrary to what you would expect," mentioned Kat.

Organizational consultants have conceptualized trust, in the context of work teams, as integrity (brown, 2021), or honoring our word by doing what we said we would do. Trust has also been conceptualized as the ability to not scare others through our communication (Glaser, 2016). My findings offer empirical evidence to support and extend Glaser's (2016) claim. We can create conditions for trust both by not scaring others and also helping them relax.

This study illuminates two elements that contributed to creating conditions for relaxation: presence and play. Several participants described their sense of presence while telling a story and playing the handpan as an empty mind (e.g., "the mind is somewhere else,") in which the story came to them in bits and pieces or, as participants said, in "rhythms" and "waves." Some participants described presence while listening as a heightened attention in the interlocutor (e.g., 'the speaker is all you can see,') and not the outside world (e.g., "as far as the music went, that's as far as I went"). That state of mind allowed them to immerse themselves in the story (e.g., "the story consumes you…you are embedded in it.")

The literature identifies presence as a condition for dialogue (Cissna & Anderson, 1994, 1998; Johannesen, 1971; Stewart et al., 2004). My findings offer empirical support for this claim; a quieting of the mind while speaking and listening (i.e., presence) contributes to

149

dialogue. Furthermore, this study offers qualitative evidence for the way presence appears through music-making and storytelling. Participants' narrations suggest that presence helped them to self-disclose with less control (e.g., "I wasn't thinking, I just knew what to say"; "I said the first thing that came to my mind"). Some participants described presence as an emptiness of the mind followed by an impulse or instinct of what to say next. I believe this rhythm of emptiness-impulse-emptiness-impulse is "a spirit in transit made manifest in voice" (Poulos, 2008, p. 132). My findings also support that music-making in the context of a group conversation is relaxing (de Witte et al., 2020; Faulkner, 2016; Jacoby, 2020; Lott, 2019; Pavlicevic, 1999).

Play, unlike presence, is a lesser known condition for trust and for promoting dialogic moments. Historically, dialogue scholars speak of the importance of positioning people to engage in an I/Thou and Person-Centered interaction—one rooted in honesty, care, and acceptance (Barge, 2017; Cissna & Anderson, 2002; Johannesen, 1971; Stewart et al., 2004). The list of ideal ways to relate does not include fun, and fun is at the heart of play (Eberle, 2014).

Play owes its playfulness to neoteny—a display of juvenile traits in adults (Gilead, 2020). Historically, dialogue scholars mention that a strong contact between humans occurs when insights (about self and others) appear, when there is mutual validation, and when there is transparent communication without agenda (Buber, 1958; Cissna & Anderson, 2002). The list does not include a contact where juvenile traits are on display.

This study suggests that, when participants engage in silly games that invite childlike communication like playing with amusing and nonsensical ideas or vocal intonations, participants calm down (e.g., "I think the playing beforehand facilitated that relaxation, that feeling of 'oh, this is fun. We can trust each other. It's just a game'"). Participants narrated

that one of the aspects that made the dialogue fun and relaxing was the lack of expectation to "sound good" but rather encouragement to explore. That freedom to explore is necessary to experience play (Aronsson, 2010; Eberle, 2014).

The findings of this study suggest that the release of tension that happens when dialogue participants play (e.g., creating a story about a birdboy or a school bus that goes to outer space) promotes trust and/or dialogic moments. The findings also suggest that play broke with programming of perfectionism or performativity, which participants deemed as freeing. These findings extend our understanding of prescriptive dialogue (Barge, 2017; Buber, 1958; Cissna & Anderson, 2002; Stewart et al., 2004; Rogers, 1951) by adding fun/playfulness to the quality of contact that promotes dialogic moments.

Past research suggests that trust has a role in promoting dialogic moments (Montague, 2012). When the person reveals a "hidden" or unusual part of themselves and the other welcomes it, a profound connection can happen (Montague, 2012). However, this past research is limited by the fact that Montague's participants narrated experiences that happened years ago, and perhaps their memories had blurred.

This study offers strong support for Montague's (2012) claim: trust facilitates the disclosure of more personal and unusual aspects not on display. Several participants claimed in our interviews, without me having to ask, that they felt trust toward the group and the facilitator (e.g., "first I felt resistance, then a kind of freedom, peace, and trust"). They also perceived trust in other dialogue participants as a result of witnessing those participants share vulnerable aspects of themselves (e.g., "It was raw. That felt so uncensored. I know Emilia felt safe."). My findings suggest that many participants were able to show an unusual side of themselves thanks, in part, to the trust they felt toward the group and the facilitator.

151

In summary, my findings extend our understanding of the conditions that promote trust, dialogue, and/or dialogic moments. The findings suggest that trust emerges when participants are feeling relaxed. Presence and play contributed to the relaxation. These findings advance our understanding of how to bring dialogic moments to life (Barge, 2017; Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008; Stewart et al., 2004). More specifically, these findings extend our understanding of prescriptive dialogue (Barge, 2017; Buber, 1958; Cissna & Anderson, 2002; Stewart et al., 2004; Rogers, 1951) by adding relaxation and playfulness to the quality of contact that promotes dialogic moments. Although the data cannot provide support of whether relaxation and playfulness are required for dialogue, the data shows these two elements certainly catalyze dialogue.

Heartfelt Connection Can Happen in Moments of Emotional Convergence

The findings of this study indicate that when the listener perceives an emotional convergence with the speaker, then a perceived deep, strong, and obvious heartfelt connection will happen. Fifteen participants claimed to have felt this connection with at least one other dialogue participant. Many participants explained "they could relate to the speaker's feeling," or understood how he felt, since they had experienced a similar situation at some point (i.e., emotional convergence).

Dialogic moments have been conceptualized both as a perception and a feeling. Buber (as cited in Cissna & Anderson, 1998) described a dialogic moment as perceiving God in another, similar to the yogi term namasté (i.e., the God within me sees the God within you). Buber and Rogers both agreed that, by accepting differences, the perceiver can transcend the perception of difference and, thus, fall into a dialogic moment (Cissna & Anderson, 2002). On the contrary, the findings of this study suggest that the perception of

similarities transcends the perception of difference and leads to emotional convergence (e.g., "oh, we are all the same," "we have shared joys and shared pains.")

The finding that dialogic moments occurred during perceived emotional convergence (e.g., "I felt that too," "that was me," "the same happened to me") supports the claim that dialogic moments occur when there is a perception of unity (Baxter, 2004) and offers empirical support for Shotter's (1993a) claim that a dialogic moment is a feeling that establishes a shared ground between people.

When the listener hears a story that resembles a past experience of theirs, there can be a convergence of feelings in relation to that shared experience. This finding advances our understanding of dialogic moments (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001; Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008) by raising the question of whether or not dialogic moments can emerge if the listener doesn't share an experience that is similar to the speaker's experience. This question is something that future research should directly consider.

Furthermore, emotional convergence can resemble Miller's (2007) description of connection in the context of compassion shown by emotion workers. Some emotion workers labeled empathy as connection—the process of understanding what is happening with another and accompanying them in a shared emotional experience (Miller, 2007). A few emotion workers, however, claimed to have difficulty connecting with people from different races, upbringings, or cultural backgrounds than theirs. Similarly, one of my participants mentioned she did not connect with another participant when he told his story because their family experiences did not match.

I don't have enough data to empirically support the claim that a lack of emotional convergence complicates connection, as Miller's (2007) data would suggest. Yet, a consistent theme across the interviews related to how a perceived strong, heartfelt connection happens

in the recognition of shared feelings associated with a similar experience. This is especially true for in-group members who already share an identity of belonging to the same group.

If this is true, then facilitators should limit storytelling and dialogue to create emotional convergence and, rather, consider other methods that may be more effective in facilitating emotional convergence. Theater and role play, for example, are known to create an empathic attunement of another person's lived experiences, especially when those experiences are unknown to the actor (Rohd, 1998; Sunwolf, 2006). By acting out a new situation, the participant embodies a reality that is different from theirs and, thus, has a visceral understanding of a situation that used to be foreign. Role playing may create a connection that storytelling may not, which is something for facilitators to consider.

In summary, the finding that dialogic moments occur during moments of emotional convergence suggests that heartfelt connection emerges when we perceive unity (Baxter, 2004). More specifically, the finding suggests that the recognition of a mutual feeling sparks connection by creating a common ground with another person (Shotter, 1993a).

On the other hand, the finding that dialogic moments occur during emotional convergence raises the questions as to whether or not two people with very different life experiences can fall into dialogic moments. Can two people with no shared experiences, and thus no convergence of feelings in relation to those experiences, perceive a strong, deep, heartfelt connection with one another when they communicate? The finding begs for the exploration of dialogue's ability, or lack thereof, to facilitate heartfelt connection between people who perhaps had different upbringings or, said colloquially, appear to be "on different paths." In short, dialogic moments appear in the perception of similarities and under the condition of perceiving an emotional convergence related to a shared lived

experience. Future research could usefully examine how dialogic moments may also appear in the perception of difference.

Dialogic Moments Can Be Perceived by Only One Member of the Dyad

Dialogic moments have been assumed to be mutual feelings that occur for both members of the dyad. The way in which scholars describe dialogic moments may imply the connection is shared: "a moment when it's clear that a strong, heartfelt connection is made between humans" (Poulos, 2008, p. 117); an emotionally rewarding conversation between two people (Montague, 2012); a feeling of surprise shared by dialogic partners (Cissna & Anderson, 1998), and a mutual recognition of the God within (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). Nevertheless, those who have collected data on dialogic moments (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001; Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008) have only explored one person's perception of the moment.

Given that my study explored both people's experience of a dialogue, the findings illustrate that, at times, the heartfelt connection was one sided. This was true even when dialogue participants related in an I/Thou way. That is, they claimed to be present, I watched them display behaviors of validation (i.e., clapping when the stories ended), and they said they learned insights about the self and others—all characteristics of an I/Thou relation.

I found five people who experienced a connection with someone who did not experience a connection with them. No patterns emerged from this category to shine light as to why the connection was only felt by one person in the dyad. Yet, in addition to emotional convergence, some dyads in the mutual connection category had a previous relationship, displayed additional behaviors that demonstrated liking or caring, or offered deeply personal details in their stories that moved the second member of the dyad.

It is worth noting that a one-sided heartfelt connection is different from a mutual heartfelt connection. The latter requires that both people feel a connection. It could be argued, then, that a one-sided connection is empathy felt by one individual, yet not reciprocated.

I argue that both types of connection (one-sided and mutual) should be categorized as connection. First, Miller (2007) shows that skilled empathetic people use the word connection to refer to empathy—the act of taking someone else's perspective and sharing an emotional experience. We might be using two different words (i.e., connection and empathy) to refer to a similar experience.

Second, the term "one-sided connection" might open up something for the reader, especially dialogue scholars, that "empathy" may not. One-sided connection brings awareness to the fact that, even when two people relate to one another in an I/Thou way, and experience relaxation and playfulness in the interaction, one person may connect to the other, but the other won't. Connection can be a one-sided experience within a relational process (i.e., two people being in relation to one another).

The findings extend our understanding of prescriptive dialogue (Barge, 2017; Buber, 1958; Cissna & Anderson, 2002; Stewart et al., 2004; Rogers, 1951) and dialogic moments (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001; Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008) by suggesting that, even when two people are positioned to relate in an I/Thou way and appear to do so, dialogic moments may not be felt by both parties. If dialogic moments are at times one-sided, then facilitators should consider the limitation of dialogue to create connection across two people, even when those individuals are in-group members.

Mental Noise and Cautiousness Complicate Connection

There were four participants who felt no connection, and others did not feel especially connected to them (i.e., no connectivity). These four participants experienced mental noise and cautiousness. The mental noise happened during the telling of their story (e.g., "I kept reminding myself that I was not proficient with the instrument"), while listening to others (e.g., "I noticed myself drift away and instead fixate on 'what am I going to share?'"), or both. The pattern of uncontrolled mental noise is the opposite of the theme of presence described by the participants who experienced at least one dialogic moment, whether mutual or one-sided.

Presence was, overall, an important theme in this study. Prior to dialogue, practitioners sometimes instruct participants to be present so they may engage in dialogue (Barge & Little, 2002; Maoz & Ellis, 2006; Schwarz, 2002). The instruction to be present implies a potential assumption that participants can consciously direct their attention to the present.

My findings suggest that, even in carefully set conditions, some people have extreme difficulty being present. As Jack noted, "I don't know how much choice there is" in the ability to quiet the mind. Three participants described noticing a mental noise that was out of their control. The fact that some participants had extreme difficulty being present advances our notion of dialogue (Barge, 2017; Broome, 2013; Hedman-Phillips & Barge, 2017; Holman, 2013; Johannesen, 1971; Maoz & Ellis, 2006; Schwarz, 2002; Stewart et al., 2004) by showing that some people have extreme difficulty being present and, therefore, engaging in dialogue.

Interestingly, the mental noise at times took the form of critical self-reflexivity (something that is typically considered to be a good thing). Critical self-reflexivity is a form

of thinking in which the person questions and unsettles her own thinking about specific matters (Cunliffe, 2004, 2009). This is typically considered to be a sign of sophisticated thinking and ethical practice. Ron, in particular, was critically self-reflexive during the dialogue by noticing his mental chatter and questioning it (e.g., "Why is this [the music] bothering me? Why am I judging her?") Although the critical self-reflexivity did not facilitate listening, his self-awareness is worth noting. It is possible that other participants experienced a similar mental noise but did not report it due to a lack of awareness.

It is interesting to note that critical self-reflexivity is not always a good thing and can block connection with others. Poulos (2008) claims that dialogue occurs in the collective silence, which suggests moments of internal self-reflection when the rest of the group is silent. Indeed, this study suggests that engaging in critical self-reflexivity while another person is talking can make it difficult for the thinker to listen and connect.

My interviews with participants served as a space for them to reflect critically. Charlotte, for example, used the space to reflect on her thoughts ("my mind was very arrogantly chatting away 'I would have done this' or 'they could be doing that'") and the consequences of those thoughts (i.e., "you can't have a heartfelt connection when that's going on"). The findings suggest that participants benefit from having a post-dialogue conversation in which they can safely and critically reflect on the dialogue and themselves. Some questions that prompted critical reflexivity and could be used in the future include: Remember an instance when you heard another person's story—what was that listening experience like? What did you learn about others because of the dialogue? What did you learn about yourself? And did you experience a deep, clear, heartfelt connection with anyone in that space?

Three of the four participants who experienced uncontrolled mental noise wanted connection. Their testimonies contradict the notion that the desire to engage in dialogue is key to it happening (Poulos, 2008). Although I agree that not wanting connection will complicate connection, as was the case for P1, I found that three out of four participants in the "no connection" category wanted connection.

What's more, other dialogue participants did not feel particularly connected to those who experienced an uncontrolled mental noise. In the case of dialogue one, at least three people described P4 as "cerebral" or "not really there." What is interesting is that their impressions of P4 (e.g., "he was in his mind") matched P4's description of himself ("I was a bit too much in my head…to much analyzing").

Because of this study, we know that uncontrolled mental noise (i.e., the inability to quiet the mind and redirect attention to the present) can make it (a) very difficult for an individual to connect to others and (b) for others to connect to that individual. This advances our notion of a dialogic moment (Barge, 2017; Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001; Montague, 2012; Poulos, 2008; Stewart et al., 2004) by showing how a person's mind can make it difficult for a dialogic moment to arise. This is true even when the person claims to want connection.

The four participants who experienced no connection also displayed signs of cautiousness. They claimed to be monitoring themselves. One of them said he refrained from telling a story that he thought would put his image at risk, and another said she tends to "hold herself a little guarded." Some of those who listened to these "cautious" stories were left (a) with lingering questions regarding the context (e.g., "I didn't know if there was more there to the story") or (b) unable to recognize a deeper side of the speaker (e.g., "I didn't get the feeling that I got to know a lot about him").

As Baxter (2004) notes, Bakhtin believed that perceiving different sides of one person is needed for deep heartfelt connection. As an example, Bahktin would suggest that if P3 had told a story that showed another side of her besides likable, those in the group would have been more likely to connect with her. Echoing Bakhtin's work, we know that communicating soul opening / innermost thoughts (i.e., deep talk) can actually be perceived as beautiful (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001).

My findings suggest that cautious sharing has the opposite effect of deep talk. Whereas listeners can perceive deep talk as beautiful (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001), they can perceive cautious sharing as confusing or even unsatisfying. My findings also illustrate that mental noise and cautious sharing can alienate others. It is possible that participants shared cautiously to protect themselves from potential hurt. Nevertheless, by doing so, they also limited the possibilities for a deep, strong, heartfelt connection with others.

In summary, this study explored negative cases of connection by doing a cross-examination of experiences. My findings demonstrate that both (a) an uncontrolled mental noise and (b) cautiousness alienates the speaker from (a) perceiving a strong, deep, heartfelt connection with another and (b) having that feeling reciprocated.

Fusing Music-Making and Storytelling Facilitates Stories with Rich Personal Details

The disclosure of private aspects of the self appears to be important for successful dialogue. Time and time again, since the early 20th century, various dialogue scholars have alluded to the idea of multifaceted selves in different ways. Buber (as cited in Cissna & Anderson, 2002) alluded to the idea of showing different facets by encouraging authenticity (i.e., not pretending or putting up a façade). Bakhtin (cited in Baxter, 2004) labeled the display of different aspects of the self as aesthetic love and linked it directly to dialogic moments. Aesthetic love refers to the moment in which one person shows another an aspect

of himself that is not usually on display. Such behavior gives the listener the opportunity to perceive and respond to that unusual side. Both Buber and Rogers (as cited in Cissna & Anderson, 2002) suggest responding to the "unusual" side with acceptance and validation.

In more recent times, scholars continue to address the importance of aesthetic love in dialogue. It can be profound and emotionally rewarding for the listener to be trusted with a private and unusual side that only the speaker has access to (Montague, 2012). It can be not only beautiful but also emotionally rewarding for the listener to be trusted with a person's innermost thoughts and feelings (Baxter & DeGooyer, 2001). Perhaps the beauty stems from the fact that those innermost thoughts and unusual sides reveal a multifaceted and complex human.

One of my participants described her experience of aesthetic love during the Flow Technique as "not hiding," which is exactly what the Flow Technique invited. As Julia described, "it [the Flow Technique] just creates something really special that people start to open up and maybe even reveal somethings they wouldn't without that." My findings extend our understanding of the ways in which improvisation, specifically the fusion of music-making and storytelling, contributes to dialogue.

First, the findings offer empirical evidence to support that improvisation brings to the surface feelings/experiences that were outside of the person's initial awareness (Singhall & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Vougioukalou et al., 2019). Participants described how the storytelling prompts helped them "connect the dots" or realize the beauty in their own life experience that they hadn't realized. Rogers (as cited in Cissna & Anderson, 2002) suggested that dialogue participants openly communicate their awareness of certain experiences. Yet, if the person lacks the awareness of the experience, it complicates dialogue. My findings

161

suggest that fusing music-making with storytelling indeed brings experiences and insights into awareness.

Second, my findings also offer empirical evidence to support the claim that improvisation is a sensual method of inquiry (Bell, 1995; Pelias, 2018). That is, information comes to the surface in what I described as feelings. My participants described the process as rhythms or waves (e.g.,"it's like a dance—the body takes whatever rhythm is up and expresses it"). The findings suggest that presence and performative inquiry are extremely interconnected, if not impossible to separate.

A theme that emerged across the dialogue transcriptions and the interviews related to the depth of the stories shared by participants. After doing a cross examination between the experience of improvising a story while playing the handpan and the experience of listening to those improvisations, my findings suggest that many stories contained rich, personal, and nuanced details that moved the listeners. Listeners described these stories as artistic, poetic, vulnerable, powerful, transparent, incredibly full of depth, and how "they could feel it." I found that participants often linked the artistry of the story with "all the little details that were there" and the fact that the stories made them feel something.

Without exception, the stories that moved the listeners came from speakers who described experiencing presence—a quieting of the mind—while speaking. These speakers, who were the majority of the sample, shared stories that contained word-by-word conversations between characters, their personal reactions to the scene, thoughts in relation to the scene, feelings, and insights in relation to the scene. Some participants explained that playing the handpan while telling a story allowed them to "be led by their emotions" and be present "without hiding." In return, the speakers were moved (e.g., "It was something [a story] you needed to take a deep breath for").

As a result of this study, I conceptualize art as that which we create when we are in the present (i.e., an empty mind), with an open heart (i.e., without cautiousness, hiding, or holding back), and the end result makes the receiver feel something. This is by no means the only definition of art, but what art appears to be based on this study's data. I offer this definition so artists may think about their art in a new way, and potentially transform their work process.

This study suggests that asking people to improvise a personal story while playing the handpan, after a series of warm-up games, facilitate stories that are rich in nuanced personal details. This advances our notion of dialogue (Barge, 2017; Stewart et al., 2004) by showing that the fusion of music-making, storytelling, and dialogue invites, in some cases, the uncensored disclosure of personal details that move the listener. My findings suggest that these artistic stories, rich in personal details, allowed others to know the speaker at a deeper level and fall into (oftentimes mutual) heartfelt connection.

Practical Implications

This study carried several implications for leaders and facilitators. Based on the findings, I recommend (a) using the Flow Technique to promote trust and connection with a small group (b) using the Flow Technique to invite relationality and invitational reflexivity within the small group. I also recommend (c) considering when not to use the Flow Technique.

Use the Flow Technique to Promote Trust and Connection in Teams

Participants who tried the Flow Technique felt trust toward the group, and experienced deep, heartfelt connections through the course of the dialogue. The facilitator plays an important role by reminding people that mistakes are welcomed, and encouraging participants to simply 'play and have fun with it.' Leaders who want to promote trust and

connection between team members would benefit from experimenting with the Flow Technique.

The Flow Technique could be used as a routine space that invites the sharing of personal stories. In fact, some participants' testimonies implied an unspoken plea for play and human connection in the workplace. One of my participants mentioned how colleagues don't humanize each other enough in the workspace, a testimony that echoes Tietsort's (2021) findings that employees don't perceive their full selves as necessarily invited into the workspace. Leaders could use the Flow Technique specifically to invite, recognize, and validate whole selves while attending to what appears to be a desire for play and connection in the workplace.

It is possible that leaders or facilitators won't feel comfortable purchasing a handpan, or facilitating a dialogue with the handpan, if the instrument is foreign to them. As my research suggests, setting the conditions for relaxation by simultaneously combining two art-forms, in this case storytelling and music-making, promotes trust and connection. If the handpan is not an option, I invite leaders to think of additional ways to fuse storytelling with another art form to create a sense of play, presence, and relaxation (e.g., drawing and telling a story at the same time or sculpting and telling a story at the same time.)

Use the Flow Technique to Invite Relationality and Invitational Reflexivity in Teams

Secondly, leaders may benefit from using the Flow Technique to invite two relational outcomes for their team: relationality and invitational reflexivity. My findings suggest that the dialogue invited an appreciation for the people in the space and also encouraged inviting-accepting cycles post dialogue (i.e., relationality). Some participants explicitly invited other participants to continue their interaction at a coffee shop, restaurant, or bars. Some of them

were texting hours after the dialogue. Others mentioned they wanted to make an effort in the future to speak to the people who were present in the dialogue.

Inviting-accepting cycles help to develop the trust necessary to eventually reveal an unusual aspect of the self (Montague, 2012). If this aspect is welcomed by the other, a profound connection may occur. In short, it is possible that the inviting-accepting cycles post-dialogue help to cultivate trust and connection. Leaders who want to cultivate relationality in a team could turn to the Flow Technique as a resource.

The second relational outcome is invitational reflexivity. In the context of this study, invitational reflexivity consisted of listening to every participant's vision for the collective and then weaving those visions into a master story. During our interviews, some participants mentioned they learned about "what really matters" to other team members through the weaving of visions.

Invitational reflexivity is a way to set the conditions for inclusivity (Oliver & Fitzgerald, 2013) and address power issues (Barge, 2004; Smith & Keyton, 2001). My findings suggest that invitational reflexivity inspired a desire for collaboration in dialogue participants. Leaders who want to inspire team members to collaborate or create a sense of community, in which every team member's voice is heard, would benefit from using the Flow Technique. The weaving could also raise the collective's moral. It makes sense that employees are more excited to work toward a vision they helped to create—and understand their role in its creation—as opposed to working toward someone else's vision.

I believe anyone who wants to facilitate the Flow Technique can do it. Based on the findings, I recommend that whoever facilitates the Flow Technique engages in three practices. First, ask participants to not worry about creating beautiful sounds with the handpan. Second, fully accept and respect whatever story/music participants produce. Third,

release yourself (the facilitator) from the expectation to facilitate the dialogue perfectly.

These three practices contribute to the facilitation of the Flow Technique.

Consider When Not to Use the Flow Technique

As the study evolved, I noticed three limitations to the Flow Technique itself—

besides the fact you need to own a handpan—that facilitators should consider. The Flow

Technique can be potentially stress inducing for at least three populations. First, those who

are telling a story in a second language experience greater cognitive stress than those who are

telling a story in their native language. Seven out of the eight international participants

reported enjoying the Flow Technique. However, one shared that speaking in a second

language made the Flow Technique very difficult. Had he been speaking in his first language,

he said, the experience would be different. It is possible that doing the Flow Technique in a

second language induced stress for international participants, even if they did not report it.

The Flow Technique also can be potentially stress inducing for people who are (a)

unable to sit down on the floor, or (b) experiencing neurodiversity. I realized the latter when

a potential participant contacted me expressing his interest to participate. Yet, he was

concerned that his condition of aphantasia (an inability to form mental pictures), as well as

being on the autism spectrum (self-diagnosed), would induce more thoughts than usual and

make it harder for him to express in a heartfelt way. This man suggested that I play the

handpan while he told a story. Although we agreed to this variation, our schedules

unfortunately did not overlap, and he could not participate. Yet, the conversation sensitized

me to his claims and to the potential cases of neurodiversity in my sample that were not

disclosed.

Two of my participants seemed to have really struggled to articulate their story. One

of them confirmed during the interview that she, indeed, struggled to speak. I suspect these

two participants may be experiencing neurodiversity, yet I did not ask them and cannot confirm this. I don't have data to support that the Flow Technique is stressful for those with neurodiversity other than my intuitive insight on the matter.

This is a future direction to explore: how to make the Flow Technique more accessible. More specifically, future research could explore how to position the handpan in a way that is accessible for those who can't get on their knees. Furthermore, how to customize the Flow Technique for people experiencing neurodiversity, and whether the Flow Technique could even be used by counselors who want to better understand a client.

Third, the Flow Technique can be potentially stress inducing for teams in which bullying or aggression occurs. I trusted participants would be respectful and not misuse shared stories because I know the nature of these collectives. A limitation of the Flow Technique is that not everyone may extend this respect. If this is true, a facilitator/leader needs to carefully consider if the group at hand will be respectful during a meeting like this. As I mentioned, the Flow Technique can open people up in uncensored ways. In the presence of respectful teammates, the improvisations are beautiful. In the presence of disrespectful teammates, the improvisations can become data for bullying. Facilitators need to carefully assess the group's readiness for a dialogue like the Flow Technique given the type of communication it facilitates.

Limitations

This study has some limitations to note, including (a) my own bias as the dialogue designer, (b) the timing of six interviews, (c) the sample, and (d) participants' diverse definitions of connection and abilities to connect.

My Own Bias as the Dialogue Designer[5]

One of the limitations of the research design, because it influenced my own biases, was being both the dialogue designer/facilitator and the researcher. As the designer, I intentionally crafted a dialogue that set the stage for connection. As a researcher, I carried that preconception with me to the data analysis—that connection was likely to appear since the dialogue aimed to facilitate connection. This preconception may have influenced the codes and the writing. If someone else were to do a study to attend to this limitation, I recommend separating the roles of facilitator and researcher. The researcher would ideally be unaware of what the Flow Technique intends to do to avoid bringing that bias into the data collection and analysis.

Another limitation is in relation to my field notes. I was so captured by each person's story, completely immersed quite frankly, that at times I would forget to pay attention to the behaviors exhibited by the listeners. I was also afraid to distract the listeners with my staring. It would have been ideal to have a second researcher observing the interactions from the outside.

Interviews

The interview process had three limitations. I was happiest with the quality of the 14 interviews that I conducted within days of the dialogue. Six of the interviews, however, happened a bit later. Four happened a week after the dialogue, and two happened three weeks after. Although a week may seem like a small period of time, participants were already struggling to recall small details of the dialogue. The timing of these six interviews may have

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[5] Overall, this study approached reality from a standpoint of subjectivity. My participants' realities are subjective and not necessarily applicable to everyone. My interpretations of the data are also subjective, for I bring my own biases. The data could easily be interpreted differently by another researcher.

reduced the amount of detail the participants were able to recall. Because participants were

struggling to remember details, this study also sheds light on the limitations of studies that

rely on participants' recalling lived experiences that happened months, if not years, ago.

Secondly, approximately one third of the interviewees did not live in the US and, to

my knowledge, were not used to speaking English on a daily basis. Although the diversity of

nationalities added diversity in perspectives, it is also possible that these participants may not

have been able to articulate some aspects of their experience. Third, I didn't ask any

participant what was missing from their visual metaphors, which is an important aspect of

metaphor analysis (Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2015).

Sample

For this study, I partnered with four collectives: The Blue Square, Research for

Freedom, Research for Equity, and Wild Yoga. Most participants knew me because I

belonged to the collectives in question. Because participants were familiar with me and

perhaps trusted me, it is possible our relationship made them feel comfortable opening up

during the dialogue. It also made recruitment much easier.

The fact I belonged to these collectives invited two limitations. First, participants

were aware that I designed the dialogue. It is possible that they may have exaggerated their

positive impressions of the Flow Technique given that I created it. They could have also

avoided disclosing unenjoyable aspects of the dialogue to avoid hurting my feelings.

Second, because my participants and I share similar interests (e.g., play and

connection), they were likely to enjoy the dialogue. Had I worked with collectives in which

individuals have less playful personalities or less appreciation for connection, their response

to the Flow Technique may have been less positive. Given the sample, we can assume the

results of this study are transferable to collectives that share the underlying values of this project, that is, connection, play, respect, and inclusivity.

Ability to Connect and Definitions of Connection

One last limitation, and entry for future directions, is the definition of connection used to ground and center this study. I quickly learned that connection is a broad and somewhat vague term. When I asked participants if they experienced "a strong, obvious, deep, special, heartfelt connection," some immediately answered yes and clearly identified those moments. Others were confused and responded "no, I didn't fall in love," "how do you define connection?" or "I'm not a very emotional person."

I think each person has a unique sensibility (i.e., awareness of feelings and willingness to feel them deeply) and, therefore, capacity for connection. As the study went on, I played with the wording of the question, from "strong, deep, obvious, special heartfelt" connection to "an obvious and heartfelt" connection. I also shared with three interviewees how I feel connection at a visceral level—a tender softening in my chest that forces me to pause and slightly smile—in the hopes it would clarify the meaning of the word. A limitation of this study is that participants have different sensibilities and, therefore, capacities for connection. Participants also may have different definitions of connection. This limits the study at hand because participants may have experienced different sensations, yet I placed them under the same umbrella category: connection. In short, I'm assuming all participants felt the same connection, but they may not have.

<div align="center">

Future Directions

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This study suggests several areas in which future research could continue to expand our understanding of human connection. These include (a) a phenomenology study on the ways connection is felt in the body, (b) dyadic research on dialogic moments, (c) the effect of

<div align="center">170</div>

the Flow Technique on physiological markers, (d) using the music as a data point, and (e) the ways, if any, in which the Flow Technique contributes to organizational flourishing.

First, because a dialogic moment is a feeling, there is room for a more detailed phenomenology study—the field of communication that studies visceral sensations—on how connection feels in the body, across bodies, and across different flavors of connection (e.g., appreciation, infatuation). Such a study would advance our notion of dialogic moments by adding clarity as to how exactly a dialogic moment feels. Coming up with a more precise vocabulary and awareness of the different flavors of connection at a visceral level could help us better identify dialogic moments and exclude the feelings that are close but not quite.

Second, future dyadic research should continue to explore both people in a dyad's perception of a dialogic moment rather than just one person's perception, especially after witnessing that cross-examinations provide rich interpersonal insights. A cross examination of connection would be useful in order to understand a potential link between dialogic moments and attraction, infatuation, care, or friendship.

Third, a few participants mentioned they were able to find words easily and remember instances effortlessly during the dialogue. Other participants compared the dialogue to practicing yoga or sitting by the water. Many participants disclosed emotions and personal details. All these findings suggest that the Flow Technique may be provoking physiological responses. This is an opportunity for an interdisciplinary study, in collaboration with medical researchers, to examine pre- and post-dialogue cortisol and oxytocin tests. Brain waves could also be explored.

Lastly, this study offered a dialogue design that invites two relational outcomes— invitational reflexivity and relationality—that may support organizational development. I speculate these relational outcomes could support organizational development (Marshak &

Grant, 2008) and flourishing (Seligman, 2011) based on what we know from the literature. Team members are more likely to articulate defeating practices, such as martyrdom and isolation, when they trust that they can speak candidly without reappraisal (brown, 2021; Holman, 2013). This communicative act itself may help shift an organizational culture (brown, 2021; Holman, 2013). Trust is also pinpointed as the key ingredient in feel-good interactions in the workplace (Glaser, 2016). Although the Flow Technique promotes trust, and trust appears to have a positive effect in both organizational communication and flourishing, more work is needed to explore the effects of the Flow Technique in the workplace context.

Future research would benefit from collecting data on the ways, if any, in which the Flow Technique contributes to organizational flourishing. This research could be done in at least two ways. First, researchers could conduct a social experiment in which they compare a group that does the Flow Technique more than once versus a group that doesn't (i.e., a control group). All participants would need to answer a questionnaire before and after the experiment to measure trust and positivity in their work relationships.

Second, researchers could conduct a case study with a collective that uses the Flow Technique more than once (e.g., three times) over a period of time. The researcher could explore through interviews, participant observation, and meeting analysis in what ways, if any, the Flow Technique supports organizational development and/or flourishing. In these studies, music could also be used as a data point.

Conclusion

This chapter summarized key theoretical contributions, practical implications, and limitations/future directions. This study offers empirical evidence to support that experiencing and creating conditions for relaxation promotes trust and/or dialogic moments.

I offered a handful of suggestions on how facilitators can create conditions for relaxation within the context of dialogue (e.g., fusing music-making with storytelling). For example, participants must feel free to make mistakes. The facilitator should also release herself from the burden of being perfect. Second, this study found that dialogic moments can emerge on the listener's end when there is an emotional convergence. This finding raises the question as to whether dialogic moments can emerge without such an emotional convergence. Third, this study evidences that dialogic moments, which were assumed to be a mutual experience, can be one-sided. Fourth, the study offers empirical evidence that uncontrolled mental noise and cautiousness can isolate the speaker from connection. And fifth, the study proposes that fusing music-making with storytelling contributes to dialogue by facilitating stories that are rich in personal details. Taken together, this study advances our understanding of dialogue, and art's contribution to dialogue, in valuable ways. This study also offers a methodology— the Flow Technique—that leaders can use to effectively promote trust, heartfelt connection, and invite two relational outcomes: invitational reflexivity and relationality. If anything, I hope the study inspires readers to consider the value of relaxation, playfulness, and openness in their daily conversations.

In addition to its contributions to theory, practice, and future research, the Flow Technique also meant something to me personally. This study brought trust to the forefront of my life. I learned that I take others' trust very seriously and, in fact, consider it precious. I learned that presence (i.e., an empty mind) is a valid way to access information. This study helped my mind relax with the idea of being less analytical and more trusting that guidance will land in a space of mental silence. Finally, I witnessed most of my participants feeling moved by the same thing—the care of another. That feeling of being cherished and truly valued by someone else makes the heart sing.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

*Let's start by talking about your experience **playing** the handpan and telling a story.*

1. Please remember an instance when you were telling a story while playing the handpan. What was that experience like?

2. For this question, I'll ask you to draw your answer, and then we'll talk about your drawing. If you were comparing the experience of **playing the handpan while sharing your story** to something that other people are more familiar with, what would you compare it to?

*Awesome! Now I'm going to ask you what it was like to **listen** to the peoples' stories.*

3. Please remember a specific instance when you heard another person's story. What was that experience like?

4. If you were comparing that **listening** experience to something that other people are more familiar with, what would you compare it to?

Good! You are doing great.

5. In what ways do you **sense** the space changed, if at all, as people played the handpan and told their stories?

6. Did you experience a heartfelt connection with any of the other participants?

→ <u>If yes:</u> when did these moments happen? Can you talk me through those moments when you felt connected to someone?

7. What did playing and telling stories do for you as an individual, if anything?

8. How did you feel physically and mentally hours after the dialogue? How about the next day?

9. What do you think playing and telling stories do for the group, if anything?

10. Do you think that playing the handpan made a difference in the way you told your story, if at all?

11. What are some things you learned about yourself because of the activity, if anything?

12. What are some things you learned about the others, if anything?

13. Would you say that listening to their stories provoke in you some kind of empathy, meaning, you could almost feel what they felt in that moment?

14. Would you say that you trust your teammates more after our dialogue? For example, would you feel comfortable sharing a personal story, or having a heart-to-heart conversation, with any of them outside of that space?

Lovely, we have four questions left! Because you've experienced the flow technique, you are in a great position to tell us what is the best way to use it in the future! So let me ask you...

Closing questions

15. If you were the leader of [collective's name], how would you use this technique in the future with [collective's name] staff, if at all?

16. Would you change anything about the experience you had today?

17. Is there anything you would like to add before we close the interview?

18. How old are you, what is your ethnicity, and what is your gender identity?

Thank you for participating! I'm truly grateful for your time. I will email you your Amazon gift card in the next few days.

APPENDIX B

CODEBOOK

RQ1. What did participants describe experiencing in and because of the Flow Technique that promoted trust, dialogue, and/or dialogic moments, if anything?

First-level codes

Code	Description	Examples
Relaxation (Umbrella Code)	Participant felt very calm and relaxed. They may refer to this feeling as grounding or centering. They might compare their experience to doing yoga or listening to water.	Luke (at the very end of the dialogue): I feel like I've done yoga. (...) that feeling of having done yoga feels like that's what we just did. Florencia: I love it. Thank you all. To close the dialogue, please share one word that you want to leave the rest of us with Luke: Peace Alec: oh, I was thinking about that
A. Presence	Participant talked about being in the moment, or having a clear mind. Their attention is heightened in the present moment. The world around them "melted". Some describe it as a "trance" state.	Kat: I feel like at the time somebody was playing and telling the story, that's all I could see. That's all. My entire being was there. The sounds of the instruments sort of create – I don't know if a safe space is the right word – like a fence between you as the listener and the person telling the story. Like an energetic or sound fence. And so that's all you can see. You are just so present with them.

Second-level codes

Code	Description	Examples
B. Play (Sub-Umbrella code)	Participants went through a series of emotional experiences that characterize play (Eberle, 2014). These experiences are linked to relaxation	Emilia I loved the whole thing. It was such a cool experience. Thank you for that. Because we don't always get those. (…) then you get out into life, things get very like [laughter]. And then you're craving those experiences again. So the whole thing was so cool because it was so playful. I loved that. Everything was playful.
A. Freedom to explore	Participants felt free to explore, and not sound good (Aronsson, 2010)	Ana: I think the lack of formality, and the way you facilitated it. The build up, the games in the beginning, how you communicated that 'you don't have to be perfect. It doesn't have to be good tunes. Just play with it'. I think that helped in terms of 'I'm not trying to perform'. It's more like 'I'm just present here and playing. I can fail whatever failure means in that specific scenario.' (...) So that was very freeing.

B. Fun	Participants joke, make funny voices, create nonsensical stories, laugh, and smile. Their sense of humor releases tension (**Proyer, 2018**)	Jack (during dialogue, game 2): yelping Florencia: what is that? Jack: Like a dog yelping, yelp yelp Daniela: oh, I'm thinking yelping like writing reviews [laughter]

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RQ2a: In which moments, if any, did the listener feel a heartfelt connection with another participant during the dialogue?

First-level code

Code	Description	Examples
Convergence	The listener claimed to feel a strong, deep, heartfelt connection when she knew *how* the storyteller felt. The listener experienced a situation that is similar to the speaker's, and felt the same feeling the speaker felt during that situation.	Interviewer: Was there a time you experienced a strong, deep, obvious, heartfelt connection with any of the people in that space during our activity together? Phillip: If I should pick someone, besides you, I would say it was Julia. More than with the others. (…) I think it happened when she said that she is so happy to soon go back to Europe to meet this lady she lived with before. I felt really … I had deep compassion. That's similar to my situation. Even though it's not bad to spend a week or two alone, away from my family and my wife — we often do this — but not as long as this time. I have the same feeling. Even though I've been away from home only for a few days, I miss my wife very much. I miss her. I really have deep compassion for Julia, and I could feel this love that she has for this person. That one touched me the most out of all stories — Alec: It happened with Rachel's story, the last time she felt seen, because I experienced something pretty similar at the very beginning of my grad school program. The first year for me was very, very lonely. When she was telling her story, I felt that. I was flashbacked to myself. When I experienced it. (...) I understand what that feeling is like. (…) it was like, 'yes, yes, I get you. I see you. I felt it. So THAT moment was very deep. I felt the things she was feeling in her story.

RQ2b: What did participants describe experiencing that made it more difficult for dialogic moments to emerge during the Flow Technique?

First-level codes

Code	Description	Examples
Mental noise	The participant – who admitted didn't feel a strong connection with anyone in the space – is bouncing from thought to thought while telling a story or while listening, potentially feeling overwhelmed. Others may pick up on this	Jack (talking about his metaphor of drowning): I was not stilling the water inside, internally. I wasn't fully present. I wasn't listening. I was letting the waves of thought kind of wash over me. (...) I'm kind of narrating it as a choice. I don't know how much choice there is. Sometimes it feels like it's more of a hurricane. It's out of my control how calm the waters are.
Cautiousness	The participant – who admitted didn't feel a connection with anyone in the space – is either not wanting connection, or being cautious in the selection of the story and details. The listeners claim to be missing context as to why the storyteller's story is meaningful to them.	Interviewer: Why do you think that strong, obvious, heartfelt connection didn't happen? Olivia: I probably tend to be… to hold myself a little guarded. (...). No, it (connection) didn't cross my mind. — Jack: I was going to tell a story about this girl Tess knew that I dated. But then I thought, 'oh, no, that's not – you don't want to tell that story because (...) you have your face needs.' (...) Yeah, yeah, being likable is one of them. That's the big one that was playing (in my mind). I have this impression about myself, that I'm a likable guy. And in order to preserve that image with Tess, I was like, 'Oh, don't tell this story, that's complicated.' — Julia: I take Ron again, as an example. I didn't get the feeling that I really got to know a lot about him. (...) It's really important for him to be seen. He had this part in his story, right? I would have enjoyed the story of 'Why?' Then he would open up! He would have opened up as to why he wants to be seen. Because there's a story behind that

RQ3: What relational outcomes does the Flow Technique invite?

First-level codes

Code	Description	Example
Creative collaboration	The participant enjoys creating a story as a group. They valued every individual's contribution, and the final team creation. Claims from participants that the meeting could unleash creativity and a desire for collaboration	Emilia: I felt how wonderful co- creation can be. It's like, 'what you can offer only elevates what I can offer. And what I offer then elevates what you can offer'

Second-level codes

Code	Description	Example
Invitational reflexivity	Invitational reflexivity happened during a storytelling round, in response to the prompt *Imagine you were a part of your perfect version of [Collective's name]. What would one day in this perfect [collective] look like?* The group was invited to share but also hear different voices, take these voices seriously, and weave them together. The final story sets the conditions for new possibilities for action. Invitational reflexivity is tied to the person's ability to connect, and in this case memorize, the vocabulary and *values* of the people present in that space **(Barge, 2004)**	Field notes, dialogue 1: Julia, whose turn came four places after Zoe, weaved into her perfect gathering the first thing Zoe originally mentioned – wanting small group interactions. Zoe and I looked at each other at that moment. She smiled and giggled. I got a feeling she felt acknowledged. Rachel (talking about her perfect day in a research collaborative, during the dialogue): we might do research somehow with a community, and then interact with the people that transformed lives in that community (...). Maybe some school kids, women, some marginalized group. (...) Then we can do some transformation *there*.

| Inviting-accepting cycles | Participants continue to engage in an inviting-accepting cycle, outside the meeting, with at least one participant who was present in the meeting.

The inviting-accepting cycle consists of extending invitations, through nonverbal and verbal communication (e.g. inquiries about one's life), which is reciprocated through an open expression communicated by the other (e.g., self-disclosure in response to the other's inquiry). By remaining open to extending or accepting invitations during the course of their relationship, participants are making space for dialogue with that individual (Montague, 2012) | Field notes, dialogue 3: After the dialogue, Tess, Daniela and Jack stay in the room while I clean up. I hear Tess say she's on her way to Starbucks to get some work done. "Can I come with you?" Daniela asks. "Yeah!! That is why I said it with a lingering tone" Tess responds. They laugh. Tess and Daniela head together to Starbucks

Zoe: I kind of already had (a heart-to-heart conversation with another participant). Julia came, I think it was day two. She came in and said something about how she had this realization about herself (...). I said 'me too'. I realized that about myself a long time ago (...). And that was that. I was actually thinking about talking to Kat and seeing what she talks with her husband about all this. Phillip shared some of his stuff with me. He had some kind of eye opening experience. And then we're talking with Kat, and we were all three of us. We've already had (heart-to-heart conversations after the dialogue) |

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APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Sarah Tracy
CLAS-SS: Human Communication, Hugh Downs School of
480/965-5095
Sarah.Tracy@asu.edu

Dear Sarah Tracy:

On 2/18/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	The Flow Technique: Introducing musical improvisations to dialogue
Investigator:	Sarah Tracy
IRB ID:	STUDY00015409
Funding:	Name: Arizona State University (ASU)
Grant Title:	
Grant ID:	
Documents Reviewed:	• Consent Form 15-02-2022.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Recruitment_methods_email_15-02-2022.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Social Behavioral Protocol_V2.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Supporting documents_Interview Guide 15-02-2022.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Supporting documents_Overview 15-02-2022.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Supporting documents_Team Dialogue 15-02-2022.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 2/18/2022.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

REMINDER - Effective January 12, 2022, in-person interactions with human subjects require adherence to all current policies for ASU faculty, staff, students and visitors. Up-to-date information regarding ASU's COVID-19 Management Strategy can be found here. IRB approval is related to the research activity involving human subjects, all other protocols related to COVID-19 management including face coverings, health checks, facility access, etc. are governed by current ASU policy.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Florencia Duron Delfin
        Florencia Duron Delfin

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Introducing Musical Improvisations to Dialogue

Hi! My name is **Florencia Durón**, a doctoral communication student under the direction of Dr. Sarah J. Tracy (Advisor, sarah.tracy@asu.edu) in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to explore what simultaneous musical improvisations and storytelling can do for individuals and the collectives they belong to.

I'm inviting you to participate in this study!

Study Procedures:

To participate in this study, you must be 18 or older. If you take part in this study, you will be asked to engage in a team dialogue with three or four other members of the collective you belong to. I (Florencia) will facilitate this dialogue. You will be asked to play a musical instrument called the "handpan". You will also be asked to share fictional and autobiographical stories. After the team dialogue, I will also ask you to participate in a one-on-one interview.

- The dialogue is expected to last anywhere from 80 to 95 minutes, depending on the number of participants and their willingness to share.
- The dialogue will include playing a musical instrument, creating fictional stories and sharing true autobiographical stories. You will be invited to talk about the common themes you observed across stories and overall thoughts on the experience.
- You may or may not know your fellow participants (although it is likely that you do).
- **I ask that you please respect the privacy of your fellow participants by not disclosing any details about their stories with anyone outside of the dialogue (unless you have a fellow participant's explicit permission to do so)**.
- The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will happen via Zoom or face-to-face – your choice – within 48 hours of completing the team dialogue
- **The interview includes two questions that ask you to draw your answers.**
- The dialogue and the interview will be audio recorded
- **You have the right not to answer any question, not to engage in any activity, share only what you want to share, and to opt-out of the study at any time.**

Months after the dialogue, the research team may contact you again to (a) share the emerging findings of the study and (b) ask that you compare those findings to your experience. In case you are contacted, your participation in this conversation is voluntary.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is always voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question, any prompt, and to stop participation at any point. There is no pressure to participate. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk:

You are likely to benefit from participating in this study by experiencing a heightened self-awareness, including (but not exclusive to) individual feelings and passions. You are also likely to experience a heightened sense of trust with the team members that partake in the dialogue, potentially leading to collective empowerment, creativity and a healthier collective environment.

Additionally, you will receive a compensation of $20 in the form of an Amazon gift card for your time. The gift card will be emailed to you directly once you complete the interview.

The risks of this project are minimal. The potential risk is that sharing personal stories in front of team members might cause discomfort. We encourage you to share only what you feel comfortable sharing. **We also request that you please respect the confidentiality of those in the room by not revealing their names or stories to outside people.**

Privacy and Confidentiality:

Although the researchers promise confidentiality and ask all participants to do the same, the research team cannot guarantee confidentiality due to the nature of a group activity. You may choose not to answer any storytelling prompt, or withdraw from this study at any time.

The information that you share in the dialogue and interview will be used for a dissertation and potentially a publication. **Your real name will not be linked to anything you say**. Any identifying information will be removed from your responses. No real names will be used in the identification of the data itself. The data will be linked through pseudonyms. The identifying contact information (including names, emails, and phone numbers) will be stored on a separate word document in the password protected computer. This word document will be deleted once the dissertation is defended. The final results will be released to the collectives that participated in the study only in the aggregate form.

The data from this study will be retained for two years in a secured Google Drive folder and in a password-protected digital file only accessible by the research team. The results may be used in publications, but your name will not be used.

Questions?

If you have any questions concerning the research study at any point, please contact me at fduronde@asu.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Tracy, at sarah.tracy@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

<div align="center">

Consent to *Take Part* in this Study

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I freely give my consent to take part in this study**.** I understand that by signing this part I am agreeing to take part in a group dialogue and an interview. I have received a copy of this form to take with me. I also understand that due to the nature of this study, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

_____   _____

Name of the Person Taking Part in Study   Date

Consent to *Give a Drawing* in this Study

I freely give my consent to give my drawing in this study. I understand that by signing this part <u>I am agreeing to give my drawing in research</u>. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____ _____
Name of the Person Taking Part in Study   Date

Consent to *Record* this Study

I freely give my consent for the group dialogue and interview to be audio recorded**.** I understand that by signing this part <u>I am agreeing for the researchers to audio record and transcribe the dialogue and my interview</u>. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____ _____
Name of the Person Taking Part in Study