

## **Skilled Dialogue: Minding and Mining the Riches of Differences**

**Presented by**

**Isaura Barrera and Lucinda Kramer**

**A CADRE Webinar**

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>> Hi. I am Diana Cruz. Welcome to today's webinar. Skilled Dialogue - Minding and Mining the Riches of Differences. We are delighted you could join us today. This webinar continues a series that began in 2010 and is being presented by Doctors Isaura Barrera and Lucinda Kramer.

Phone lines have been muted to minimize interruption. You can enter any questions or comments into the questions box, not the chat box on your control panel. The Power Point for this webinar is available in the handouts box on your control panel and on the CADRE website. We are extremely fortunate to have Isaura and Lucinda with us today. Doctors Barrera and Kramer bring a rich professional as well as personal history. They've taught diverse student populations at the university level for over 20 years. Their model, skilled dialogue, is particularly focused on communication and collaboration across diverse cultural, linguistic, and other boundaries. They have written extensively on skilled dialogue and have presented on skilled dialogue to educators in multiple states. Doctor Barrera grew up on the Texas/ Mexico border and learned the challenges of diversity at an early age. She grew up in a Mexican -American dominant home culture and entered school speaking only Spanish until the Summer before her entry into first grade. She holds a BA in Major Communication Sciences and a MA in Speech Pathology and has a Ph.D. from the University of New York at Buffalo. She is currently Professor Emeritus at the University of New Mexico where she was special education faculty for over 20 years.

Doctor Kramer grew up in the Mid-West and in a culturally rich neighborhood and later worked with the American Indians in the South West. She holds a Ph.D. in special education from the University of New Mexico. Her doctoral research explored cultural competency and cross-cultural communication in a Navajo pre-school. She currently resides in Southern California where she currently is a Special Education Professor at the National University in Costa Mesa, California.

So without any further ado, I'll turn you over to Isaura and Lucinda.

>> He everyone. Welcome. I'm Isaura Barrera and Lucinda, you want to introduce yourself?

>> I'm Lucinda Kramer in Southern California.

>> I just switched the slide because, please notice, our title slide has our email addresses. They will also appear on the last slide. If you have any questions that are not answered in the webinar or simply want to get in touch with us, that's the way to get in touch with us through those emails. Okay. I want to start out by just saying a few words about skilled dialogue because most of you, based on the information that I have, are familiar with arbitration,

mediation kinds of techniques. Skilled dialogue is actually a pre-conflict type of thing. It's designed to not set up the situations that you end up addressing. But it can also be used once those situations have arisen. And it's not a problem-solving approach. It is an approach designed to set the stage for being able to choose the best approach to solving a particular issue or conflict that arises. So it's got a slightly different perspective in that sense. And you'll be able to pick that up, I think, once we get going.

Okay. The key aspect of skilled dialogue is looking at differences differently. And there are two common ways of looking at differences. One, which we call Dual Space, is subtracted. It's a this or that. You have to choose between plan A and plan B, for instance or you have to compromise. Which we'll talk about a little bit later. But either way, something gets lost from either position A or position B. 3rd space is what we have come to call the different way of looking at differences. And it's an additive. It's what's called non-dual. And what it does, it's based on the idea that the whole is greater than the part. So it takes the part, the individual perspectives, and integrates them into an inclusive whole. It's different from both and. Both and is still dual space and I compare it to segregation when they talk about separate but equal. Both and is a separate but equal approach. For skilled dialogue, it's an additive, inclusive approach. Which starts with dispositions. The dispositions are key. They are not articulated expressly typically, but they are the stance from which we approach the interactions we'll be dealing with. The first one is choosing relationship over control. The idea that we're going to prioritize relationship over this is the outcome that I want. This is the reason I'm here and I'm going to go for this outcome. It doesn't mean you give up the outcomes but it means what's prioritized is the relationship. And it involves leveraging the power of the other. So it involves not only the power that's that brought to the situation by one person, but also, leveraging the power that the other person brings to the situation even though they might be in serious conflict or appear to be in serious conflict. Nevertheless, it's the relationship between the two that eventually gets us where we want to go. So that's the first disposition. The second disposition is called, Setting the Stage for Miracles, is this not a religious thing. A miracle is simply an outcome that can't be predicted from existing data. So an outcome that can't be predicted from existing data. Meaning, here you have someone and you would swear up and down that they could not possibly do X, believe X, cooperate, whatever and it's about setting the stage for that exact same thing, for that thing to happen that we may not be able to predict. Coming out of Special Ed, which I know many of you do, this is not unusual for us because our populations that we deal with that have disabilities are consistently doing things that we might not predict based on the extensive data that we collect on them. And that involves leveraging the power of paradox. Which we're going to talk about a lot more. But paradox is the power of two things working together and complimenting each other even when they appear to be contradictory. Okay. I'm going to turn it over to Cin in a minute. But first, I want to ask just from

this brief introduction, any thoughts or questions that you'd like to have me address before we move on? No, it looks we're okay, Cin. Go ahead.

>> Hi everyone. This is, kind of, a nice visual. It's either a mustache or two snails or two fishes or two whales, but it really is symbolic of contrasting points of view for our presentation. So the question is, how might these be related? They're separate. They're two different colors. How might they contribute to each other? How could they come together? So skilled dialogue starts with the identification of two contrasting data points that appear to be contradictory and would only allow for choosing the black one or the white one. If one point of view is chosen then the other one must be excluded or minimized or leaving people involved with access to only half of what's even possible. So skilled dialogue looks at it this way. In an effort to reconcile these contrasting points of view, we use two strategies of welcoming and allowing. Welcoming the Hallmark is to positive regard for another. Positive regard is expressing genuine pleasure that you have the opportunity to spend time with the other person. I know we've all been in IEP meetings or due process meetings or difficult meetings with fellow professionals or we're supervising or mentoring, we're working with peers. And part of that is welcoming. And really looking forward to having a conversation with them not, oh, gosh, here's a meeting, got a meeting at 2:00, got to show up, got to be nice, we got to get this situation solved. We have to come up with a solution. This is the difference of reflecting in advance of welcoming, of asking yourself, I'm looking forward to this interaction. Confident, I want to learn something new. I want to learn something about that person. I want to know, I will need to look back before I go into the meeting and ask myself, what are my assumptions about my power, my ability, or my knowledge compared to the other person. Their power is frequently unbalanced. We need to, kind of, think of that before we engage. What am I basing those assumptions on? Is there really... what do I know about the other person behavior or beliefs? Is it evidence based or is it inferences from my own cultural background and experience? Are my assumptions about this person even true? Maybe I'm taking my life experience and just, kind of, laying it over them and making assumptions that may have no evidence. So as we look welcoming, the idea is to recognize the other person is capable, is meriting dignity, of course respect, no matter what their level of expertise or knowledge. So you may have a parent that has a very low idea with this in early childhood special ed frequently. Parents are just adjusting to our system of early intervention and they don't have the knowledge and they don't know how the systems work. They maybe be new to the country. So it's totally, layers and layers of knowledge and experience. And yet, I can still have a conversation. I can still do skilled dialogue because I'm welcoming them because I'm respecting who they are as a person. And I'm respecting the life experience they're bringing. So the goal here is to connect with someone with equal dignity. To assume that the other person and I are equally competent. I have may more knowledge but we're equally competent. Being able to accept them for their diverse behaviors is evidence. There's a reason for their behavior. There's a reason for their position on child rearing, for

example. It's unconditional respect. Being able to communicate to them. And what does that look like? It looks like, so when you go into a meeting, it might say something like, how are you? It's good to see you. Tell me more. I'm glad we're having this meeting. As opposed to saying, glad you're here. Have a seat. Let's talk about the problem. It's introducing and allowing time for them to become comfortable and to let them to begin to express their concerns and not keep redirecting to what your solution might be. So let's move on from welcoming to our next slide which is allowing.

So now, you're in the meeting with the person who has a highly diverse, different kind of construction. The hallmark, the expression is the other perspectives without contradictory or defense or not. Meaning, you're not judging. You're allowing them to share and be who they are to share their story. So the critical question for you is, can I listen to the other without contradicting his or her perspective or needing to defend my own or what frequently happens, is jumping to a solution right away. It's, like, you hear two minutes of their story and go, well, I can fix that for you. This is not offering solutions. This is listening to their story, inviting their story and it asks you as the listener to let go of your stories and your life experience, what you think, your judgements, your interpretation. You know, we always have that little conversation going on in our head while the other person is talking and we're trying to figure out. But we're laying over, we frequently lay over our own interpretations and our own judgements. So the goal here is to stay with attention of the contradiction. So listening without contradicting or presenting your perspective, which is really hard to do. So first, ask yourself, am I staying with attention of disagreement without trying to resolve or give solutions? Am I allowing the other person to speak before even giving my impression of my solution? So what does allowing really look like? It looks like asking someone to stay in attention and being respectful and have them tell their stories without interruptions. Good allowing looks like the other person is doing most of the talking. You are not. You are doing the listening. So you're refraining from offering solutions. You're not listening going, but, but, you know, or giving other signs of being defensive or giving either or choices. Don't interrupt. There can be some comfortable silence. When there's silence, a short piece of silence, it's just respectful. It demonstrates respect because you're thinking about what the other person just said. If you talk over them or talk too quickly and respond, it looks like you didn't take the time to process and think about what they were sharing. So it's, okay, I'm glad you told me that. I'm glad you told and expressed their concern. I can see how you feel that way now. So their explaining their story. Not, well, I heard what you said and here's what I'm thinking. It's letting them tell their story. So it's listening without interruption. Not proposing solutions and the speaking should be equal or they should speak more. So welcoming and allowing addressed contrasting points of view with no need to minimize or eliminate one over the other. So let's move on and see what's next.

>> Okay. As we start to move on just once more, any questions on welcoming or allowing? Thoughts or just, you know, anything that might come up? Be sure to type those in and we'll

respond to them as we see them. I want to say something, we talk about you need to do this and you need to do that. Who's the you? Ideally, the person that is implementing skilled dialogue is the person with the most power or most authority. It's the administrator. It's the legal consultant. It's the teacher. Whatever. However, we have also done this with families and parents and it can be done very well and managed very well from that perspective. It's a little more challenging because the person who may come feeling that no one's ever listened to them before has to spend time listening again during the allowing strategy. But it does work. We've done with the Head Start cooks and staff as well with educators. And it does work. So I just want to throw that in that, like I said, ideally, the person that is implementing skilled dialogue is the person that has the most authority or the most perceived status. However, if you, and I know, I don't know who's online right now, but I know some of the attendees were parents. And so, if you are a parent, you can go in and do this even if the other person doesn't know that you're doing it. And it does change the dynamic of the interaction. Okay. So we talked about the beginning. Now, we move from respect to reciprocity. Respect is about equal identity or equal dignity. Reciprocity is about equal voice. About equalizing the contributions. And what happens with this, if you'll notice, we still have the white and the dark and now, because it's reciprocal, each has a piece of the other. And again, there's two strategies associated with establishing reciprocity. The first strategy is sense making. Sense making is asking ourselves what is positive about the other's perspective? Maybe they're not being involved in the with school at all and you'd like for them to. Or maybe they're involved in school only in a very negative fashion. Maybe it's an administrator who wants a family to do things that the family doesn't believe that should be doing or could be doing. What is positive about that? How can or how does someone's position make sense? I heard on NPR the other day, they said, find out what's right about what they're doing. The bases for sense making, because we're leveraging the power of the other, you can't access someone's power if the entire time you're thinking that they can't do it right. That they're not doing it right. That there's nothing right about what they're doing. So sense making is about becoming curious about the other perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors, and how they make sense. What does it look like? It's basically saying, tell me more. Tell me more about that. Oh, really? And what happens when, you know, give me an example of what you just said. So it's data collection. And if we're talking about a parent talking to someone that has more control and possibly, in control of their child attending school or doesn't attend school or gets a service or doesn't get a service. It becomes very powerful for the parent to say, tell me more about why you think that's important. I want to understand. The key in sense making is if you begin to make room for the other's power, they will also make room for yours ultimately. So sense making strategy is a data collection. It's finding out why people are doing what they're doing. And then, the next one, which goes hand and hand, these happen almost simultaneously, is appreciating that. Once you find out how something makes sense, what the value of that? Not just to the person who has that

perspective but to you as well. Okay. So let's assume that there's many, many, many different scenarios depending on the external circumstances. But let's assume that person A is refusing to cooperate. Okay. And what's the value? How can you appreciate resistance to cooperation? We talk about identifying what we call the gold nuggets. Well, resisting cooperation is protective. Resisting cooperation can mean assertion of your individuality. Assertion of your voice. So it's looking at how something is contributing to the situation. What they bring to that situation, that is important. And what does that look like? Well, there's two different sides to this. One is appreciating the value it has for the other. And the other, and the second part of that is appreciating the value that it has for you. It's an expressed awareness of what you can learn. You can say things, like, I never thought of it that way. That could be very useful. Or you could say things like, I appreciate that. In fact, there's been times when I've done the same thing, and, it's been useful. Now, appreciating is not saying that it's right, necessarily. It is appreciating the value that it brings. The role that it plays in someone's life. So between the two, if it makes sense, this is critical because if something doesn't make sense it is next to impossible to appreciate it. And so, in the sense making is where cultural differences, culture used very broadly, set of differences, gender differences, economic differences, that's where an understanding of those comes in very useful because they can help us make sense of someone's behavior. Does it make sense to always resist cooperation? Well, depending on the environment in which you live and have to survive it could make a lot of sense. In other environments where people are out to help each other all the time and they contribute to each other, then, it doesn't make as much sense. We tend to not hold onto behaviors that makes sense. So if the person you're interacting with is exhibiting a behavior, typically it is because it is making sense to them and has made sense. When does it make sense to be late to appointments? When does it make sense to not show up, for instance? And these are things that don't have easy answers and they don't have the same answer. The answers are very unique to the people we're interacting with. But leveraging the power of the other is leveraging the power of their position or their perspective and what it brings to the situation. So we have looked at the respect and honoring the identity of the other person. We've looked at reciprocity and honoring the voice of the other person, how they express who they are. The first is who they are. The second is how they express who they are. And then, we're going to move onto to the next one. Cin?

>> This is my favorite. This is my favorite slide of the whole presentation when we present. It's, kind of, brings it all together. The pieces starting to come together. Right now, you're going, where are they going with this? Well, this is, kind of, where it starts to come together in leveraging the power of the paradox. Leveraging the power of the differences. Leveraging the power of the contrast between two different perspectives. How do you get to that point? By being responsive. And if you look at the graphic on this slide, you'll see that each point of view remains distinct, okay? The black stays black. The white stays white. Both are connected along

their borders. Each contains a seed of the other. Important part. Each contains a seed of the other. And finally, looking in an inclusive whole, when you look at whole, it signified by the borders. So let's look at how we move to this inclusive whole through joining. So joining is an interesting concept. The hallmark is truthfully saying, I can see myself doing or saying the same thing if I were in your shoes. If I had the same life experience, I'd probably do what that mother is doing. Or if I grew up and had that same cultural background, had some educational opportunities, I might think what that person is thinking too. So it's really seeing yourself at the point that if you were in their shoes you might be doing the same thing. Their behavior based on their experience makes sense to you. So the critical question and whether you've reached that point is, can I restate the others perspective in a way he or she feels accurate? So when you say something, it always feels really good when somebody goes, I get it. You know, I had a similar situation. They give an example that fits how you're feeling and you go, you're thinking, they got it. They understand what I'm thinking about. We're joining together. So the challenge is to restate the others perspectives that the other can say, that's it, you've got it. So it's about expressed empathy. It's you've been listening carefully to what they say without judgment, without having your own life experiences shadowing it. And you're saying, it does not require that I agree with them just that I understand and acknowledge what they're saying. Isaura always gives a really great example of joining and it's just, kind of, nice visual to think of. At a county races during the picnic race, is the three-legged race. When you tie your ankle to someone else's ankle and you're got to walk together. You still have your other leg but those two ankles are attached together. So it's, kind of, like a three-legged race where you're now moving together. You're shifting the focus from parts to the whole. So what am I doing or saying that promotes that interaction? And to what degree do I believe that the other person can listen and change? And what are common contexts do each of us have? What do we share? You're looking for something that shared. So the purpose of joining is to identify connections. Communication connections between the other persons perspectives, values, beliefs, behavior, and my own perspectives, values, beliefs, and behavior. What do we share? What is that nugget that we share that's the same and identify it. It's about being responsive to the other person. It's recognizing, as Isaura said, that all behavior is social and it's jointly constructed. Each person has a role in the interaction. It's recognizing that your own behavior is contributing to sustaining the problem or solving the problem. Really critical to take that responsibility. So to join we have to be willing to examine our role whether it's negative or positive in the interaction. Are we making the interaction worse or are we making the interaction better? And we often don't reflect. Take the time to reflect on what is our role in joining? What are we bringing to the conversation? What is the common context? What does it look like? It might be like the example, that someone might say, that's it, you've got it. Or you can say, I've said this to mom's many times when I'm dealing with a mom whose unhappy with her early childhood services. Is I, you know, we both have the same concerns. I can see that we're both concerned about this

situation. Mom is concerned from a different perspective but we're both still concerned about the best needs of the child. That's where the joining comes. And that has to be explicitly said. You can't assume that the other person sees the joining and the connection. You have to explicitly say it. And that brings down the wall between the two diverse perspectives and brings you closer to coming together. Another way of joining is talking, referencing your past experiences where you behaved in a similar way. You know, I remember personally, how my sons received special education services and I can remember being in an IEP meeting in about fourth grade dealing with his behavior and had a school phyc that was teaching and instructing me in a whole group on how to collect behavioral data on him. And it was telling me that his behavior was, basically, out of control. And now that I sit in meeting and I have a parent who is experiencing similar behaviors at home and at school with their son, I'm real comfortable saying, you know, I remember feeling that same pressure and confusion at my son's IEP meeting. And they connect. It, kind of, eliminates that power issue and you find something that you can connect to the other person based on your past experiences. So you can verbally acknowledge how ones behavior and the other persons behavior compliment each other. You know what you're actually doing can actually support the goal that we're going to work on or what you said already really is part of what I see as a solution, how we can work together. I think we're on the same page. You know, we're both concerned about your child's behavior or the transition to school. So, kind of, summing up joining has different kind of facets to it is not to use statements that reflect either or perspectives in which only one person can be right. But finding that little seed where you can both connect. Moving forward.

>> Okay. Well, I wanted to add a couple things about joining. Those of you who have held advocacy positions know joining. Joining basically, says can I trust you to state my view or my concern as I would? If I couldn't be there can I trust you to represent me? That's joining. You know you've joined when someone says, I trust you. And responsiveness is funny because you can respond to someone and not be responsive. You can say, I hear what you're saying but you're really concerned and agitated and upset and the other person is calm as a bright, new day adventure or something. You don't feel that they reflect your position. That they really understand why it's a problem and why you think that's an important thing to be taken care of at the moment. When you're joined, and that's why I said, if you had an advocacy position, advocates represent the person that they're working with. They join with that person and that's the three-legged piece. The reason I brought up the responsiveness, those of you that have ever used a phone tree to call in a complaint for something, you know, for your cable or your internet and you state a problem and they say, yes, we'll help you with that. And then, they proceed to give you a response that has nothing to do with what you just told them. It's related. You know, I learned once in a course that I did of Madeline Hunter and it said, when you're on your honeymoon, your mother-in-law is related. She's not relevant. Responsiveness is about making relevancy. Not making a related kind of response. So joining and harmonizing,



which will be the next strategy, are the key strategies. And technically, skilled dialogue is about those two. The other four are essential to set it up. And without them you couldn't get to these. But joining and harmonizing are the core of skilled dialogue. Just quickly, any thoughts or questions about joining or anything that we've talked about up to now?

>> This is Diana. We do have a couple of questions in the question box. I can go ahead...

>> Oh, none are showing up on my control panel so I can't tell.

>> Oh, yeah. No problem. Just a few and some of them are pretty related.

>> Okay.

>> The first one is, how do you balance time management with allowing?

>> [Laughter] Good question. One of the things I used to tell my staff when I had an early childhood special ed program and I would also tell this to the hospital staff where the kiddos would go for screenings. And I would say, when you're making an appointment for a parent, always make two appointments because I was working in Buffalo, New York and a lot of parents had to take the bus or take a cab, which they'd taken before. And they had other kids and they had, you know, mother-in-law and grandmothers and emergencies came up. So often they wouldn't make it to the first appointment and they would really be frustrated. And I said, okay, just go with flow. Assume that there's a good probability they'll miss it, have another appointment. You have to move out of the, what do we call it, euromerican use of time management. Our understanding of time. There are many understandings of time. And take a long-range view. Yes, we think we're losing time but in the long run, if we don't allow, we not only have lost time, we've also lost that family or that client. And then, we've lost a case entirely. So sometimes, especially if you're time conscious, it can be difficult. Just know that if you don't allow, you get the illusion of progress but you get no progress. It will get sabotaged every time. They'll nod, they'll say, and nothing will happen. So it's tricky and not always pleasant. I happen to come from an Mexican-American culture so it's not as much of a problem for me as it can be for others who come from cultures that are much more time...I shouldn't say that. We're time conscious too but we're conscious of time in a different way. So I wish I could say something that would resolve this more easily. Just build in the time and know that by the long-range measures, you're gaining time when you allow time. Okay?

>> Okay. Great. The next question is, we have some similar questions here. What are your suggestions for people who only interrupt someone because they will lose their own train thought? It's not that they're not listening, it's just that they're afraid they'll forget what they want to say.

>>Okay. I got two answers and I'm one of those, especially now, at my age. You know, I'm retired. You lose sense of time and place and everything else. One, use a notepad but two, what I have learned, and I had a problem with interrupting. I was constant interrupter for that very reason. So this comes from my own experience. But what I've learned is that even if you lose that thought, if you are really listening, you will get another thought when it's appropriate time

that will be twice as valuable because it will have incorporated what you're listening to. Again, it's an illusion that we have a thought that if we lose it we've lost everything, you know? It will solve all the world's problems and bring peace to the world and if we lose it, the world will die in, you know, ten minutes or something. Our thoughts are just not that critical. And so, trust your creativity. Trust your professionalism. Know that if you listen really carefully, when you need the right words, the right words will come. And it is initially, kind of, like, diving off the high board. So in the meantime, if you use shorthand or come up with a little symbol system or you can also have, like, color cards and a yellow card means this to you and a red card means that to remind yourself of what you want to say. But the key is to listen. And if you listen, nothing of value will ever truly be lost. I guarantee you.

>> Okay. And the last one we have is that an issue with listening is that a person can go on and on and repeat things they've told you in the past. How do you deal with that?

>> Oh, yeah. Here's the thing that I keep coming back to. And again, both Lucinda and I have lived through this. That's where the disposition of choosing relationship over control. The idea is you want to connect with that person in such a powerful way that they will believe you and they will follow your lead when the time comes. That may mean, that's the schedule more than one meeting, that the first meeting they talk about three ideas for an hour and then, you're done and you got to go. But no time has been lost because they will now come the next time more ready to hear you because you modeled what listening looks like. You've modeled respect for them so they respect you. Sometimes, if people have a history of not being heard, and very often our families that we work with, most of families and many of us, but especially, the families of people with disabilities don't ever feel they've been heard. And so, they'll say something and then, they'll say it again because they don't feel that the first one was heard. You can begin to verify that. You can begin to... listening basically says, I hear you and it's important for me to hear you. Because when we don't listen, have you ever been at a meeting and you say something and the other says, good point, and then, goes right on to something else? And if it wasn't for professionalism we would jump back in and some colleagues do to repeat what they just said. So the appreciating helps a lot with that. But it may literally mean, depending on the history of the person we're working with and it's not just families, it can be our colleagues or our supervisors, until they feel heard, you basically don't have a relationship. And without a relationship, you may get them to do what you want them to do, especially if it's, you know, do this or there will be a law suit. But there will be no real change. Try it a couple of times and play with it. And one thing I do want to say before I forget, skilled dialogue is not for every situation every time. There are times when there are legitimate time constraints this action has to be taken in 10 days or it won't be available anymore. And so, that needs to be talked about. There are situations in which there is a real abuse of power. Never use skilled dialogue with someone who is a perpetrator in the widest sense of that word with someone that manipulates and likes controls and so consciously. And you have to use your judgement to

find who those people are when that's an intentional thing. You don't want to give away your own power. And it's okay to day, you know, I'm starting to feel uncomfortable because I feel we need to move on. And yet, I really want to you. That's where harmonizing will come in. You may need to backtrack and come up with something about harmonizing before the actual harmonizing that will lead to the resolution of whatever the situation is.

So let me talk little about harmonizing because I think that becomes a key strategy. What you want to do is to generate an inclusive response, an inclusive option that integrates their perspective and your own. Skilled dialogue is not about giving up anyone's power. So is there a way to find, what I call, a third choice not a your position, my position but our if you put the two together and create a harmonious whole that integrates diverse perspectives. And apart of that is asking yourself how are positions complimentary. How do they compliment each other? And that goes back to what Lucinda was talking about joining. My need to rush and their need to spend all day talking actually compliments each other because one triggers the other. Like, we don't know what white is unless we've experienced black or dark. And we don't know what action is unless we've experienced inaction. So sometimes, we set up the very dynamics that are the most frustrating for us to deal with. So it's okay to express your perspective and you can interject. You know, allowing is about not defending your position and not interrupting but you can say things without interrupting and you can say things that state your position without defending it. So there's some nuance there in terms of being able to do that. The point though, this is about the power of paradox. Paradox is about two contradictory things both being true at the same time. And the book, which just came, which is referenced in your last slide has lots of examples and exercises for developing each of the strategies. Also, for learning about paradox. The dominant US culture is not great on paradox. It is very much either this position or that position and I won't go into any political situation that would serve as an example at the moment. But we're not good at saying, you know, that's true and this is true. It's what I call the half-full, half-empty. You know, there's arguments about, is this half-full or is half-empty. Well, if you look at the actual physical glass, it is both half-full and half-empty at the same time. And so, there are things that compliment each other. And ask yourself how is this complimenting or rounding out. Those are the little dots in the yin yang symbol, that seed of the other that helps form and inform the other. And so, harmonizing, typically in our training what happens is people can move all the way to joining and they can get to how could we do both of these things at the same time. How could we do what you want us to do and what we feel is important to do? How can we do both things? And sometimes, they need to wait and say, let's think about that because our challenge, for Lucinda and I, was harmonizing is we can't give you pre-set solutions because that's not harmonizing. That's imposing my view of what harmonizing is on somebody else. Harmonizing is something that has to be generated through interaction at the time at which you need it. So seldom, if ever, know about it ahead of time. The more you work with skilled dialogue, the more likely it is that you'll have a sense of what harmonizing

might be and you can nudge situations this way and that way to see if it's going to work in this situation. But it's not anything that can be preplanned because preplanned is not harmony. Preplanned is my view over yours even though I tell you I'm including yours. But I already knew the answer before we finished this interaction. And so, I'm not including your perspective. And yet, when things can be harmonized and we have had many, many examples in the training that we've done that were true harmonized options have come up. It is amazing, it amazing in terms of the amount of energy it generates when two people realize that they've done it. And it's amazing in terms of the barriers that are overcome and how much positive interactions occur after that because people know then when they approach someone that that person is not going to try to control the situation or try to spoon feed them solutions. But harmonizing, there's no way to really illustrate harmonizing easily. One, without interaction or visual reference, can't see any of you, and the other is the amount of time that we have. So I really recommend... we designed this book almost like a workbook. The last third of the book is like workbook to give people guided instruction. And so far, it seems to be doing that. Lucinda's already used it in one of her courses that is online. And so, most of what the students got was directly from the book and it worked. They got the idea. So we still have plenty of time, well, we have some time. So more questions. If any of you want to provide a scenario for us we can, sort of, walk through it. Again, it's a simulation so it wouldn't be exact but we can illustrate what the strategies might look like in an actual situation.

>> We did have one more question come in while you were speaking. If you want to take that first.

>> Sure.

>> What are some good resources for learning how to deal with difficult and challenging people when relationship doesn't affect the person behavior?

>>[Laughter]. Well, I mean, skilled dialogue doesn't replace any other approach that's out there. And it really depends on the dynamics of that interaction with that person. Sometimes a solution is to walk away and have nothing to do with them. Sometimes, it is to establish a relationship at a different level. So it really depends on the dynamics of how to do that. Typically, one of the most challenging things, see, as someone who grew up as a minority who grew up believing that other people knew how do things incredibly better than I could. Could speak English better than I could and could function better than I could. I started to try to figure out how I could hold onto to who I was and still negotiate the world at large. So my focus was on, what can I do to change the situation. Yes, it would be lovely if that person changed but I have no control over that. I can't change someone else. I can only change me. So I can I change my response to something without sacrificing what I hold near and dear. And when I was about 8 years old, I came home from school one day and I was just in a tear because this little girl that I was friends with had done something. I don't remember what it was. I just remember that I was just furious. And my mother said, "You know, dear, what makes us the most furious about

other people is something about ourselves that we have not dealt with yet or that we hide from ourselves". That's a difficult truth to deal with. Nine times out of ten, it's true however. It is truth. Sometime people are difficult to interact with because they mirror parts of ourselves that we don't want to see. So one of the approaches I personally would take in that situation is to say, what am I seeing in the other person that is driving me nut and why is it driving me nuts. And it's about me. Because ordinarily, the example I would give my students is if I'm having an interaction with you and I tell you how much I hate two foot, three albino adults, let's say. You'd look at me and go, yeah, so. There's no connection so it wouldn't bother that I was upset about that. It wouldn't bother you that I was badmouthing this particular population in most cases because it has nothing to do with you. But if you are particularly worried about your weight, for instance or your intelligence, and I started to criticize that, all of the sudden I would become a person difficult to deal with because it touched something. That doesn't mean it's okay for me to do that by any means or that's it's okay for you to accept it by any means. But it means that what bothers us most is typically, other people are mirrors for us. And when they mirror something that we have difficulty dealing with for whatever reason, that makes them difficult to deal with. How you approach you that, you would really need to look at the specifics. I mean, if this is your mother, you'd deal it with one way because you can't get rid of your mother in most cases. Though in some cases, you might have to do that. If this is someone that you work with on some committee, it's, sort of, important to deal with that but, you know, they're not critical to your life. If this is a child, if this is your son or your daughter. So all of that also makes a difference. Skilled dialogue takes time and self-reflection to develop. And I don't advise spending that time in self-reflection just for the fun of it. You know, it is incredibly valuable in certain situations and in certain relationships. In other relationships, it's like if it's a store clerk and I think this person is terribly rude or whatever, I'm not going to engage in skilled dialogue. I'm simply just not going to that store. So you have your judgement in terms of using these strategies. Mostly, we do it in the context in which we do it because the relationships to which we apply it, children, families, adults, around the population of individuals with disabilities, is a fragile population, is an incredibly powerful population whose power is not always acknowledged and it's worth our time and effort. It's our job. It's our vocation. It's what we have dedicated ourselves to. But in other case, it may not be that important. But I do have to tell you in most of training we get things like, can I use this with my uncle. Can I use this with my sister -in-law, whom I can't stand. And we have had participants actually do it in those cases and find some relief. In some cases, the relationship has completely changed. In other cases, at least it was a little bit less bothersome than it had been previous to what we had done. I hope that helps.

>> Okay. Thank you. We have two more it looks like. One scenario and one question.

>> Go for the question first.

>> Question first. Okay. Do you have any suggestions for building trust among participants in an IEP meeting? Example, IEP meeting and neither parents nor staff believe what the other is saying about the child.

>> Okay. Yeah, I have a suggestion. Skilled dialogue. The idea is what each of them is saying about the child is true for them and we can't say it's not true. We can say in our experience we've not seen evidence of that in that child. That's accurate. But we can't say that's not true. And for anyone that really wants to work with this, I'm not sure I put it in this book. I think I did. I know I put it in previous books. Byron Katie, B-R-Y-O-N, Katie, K-A-T-I-E has a system that she called The Work. And you can find it online at [thework.org](http://thework.org). It's a series of questions and she starts with the first question of, "Is that true"? And then, works you through a series of questions that eventually turns your perception of whatever the situation is. The idea in that sense making. I think I would emphasize sense making. Why does that view of that child make sense to that person? Sometimes it's literally true. I know that my nephew, he's now a grownup, but when he was younger as hyper as they come at home, he was a perfect student at school. It's a reverse. But if you are at an IEP meeting, my niece would say that he needed behavior management. And the teachers would say, "Why, he's perfectly fine"? And that really was their experience. So that's one situation. The other situation is it may be how they're coloring their experience of that child and then become curious. The most useful phrase I ever learned from an elementary school principal was, "Tell me more". Have the people at the IEP, which ever side wants to take the plunge, when someone says X about a child and your first reaction is that's not true. Don't say that's not true. Just say, tell me more. Give me an example. And draw out as much information as possible to figure out what's right about their opinion before they can go from there. Now, I know IEP meetings are not the best place to work this out. You know, you're time constrained and there's other people there and, you know, it's almost scripted. So it might be something that you want to work on outside of the IEP meeting, prior to the IEP meeting. So that when you come into the IEP meeting you've already established somewhat of a basis of joining or trust.

>> Okay. So we have a scenario here and then, I'm not sure if we've had another pop in but I'll get with you after. The first one says, we have an advocate who had handled the meeting between a parent and school administration. The parent has legitimate points to make related to needing reports for her daughter. However, the parent arrives late and spent the entire meeting texting and not making eye contact with the administrators. It was obvious that she was struggling to interact. How could the advocate have dealt with this diplomatically in the moment? She did not expect this situation.

>> Ah. Now, none of my answers are going to easy answers. I wish I could say, oh, I've got that answer for that, it works every time but it doesn't. And Cin, feel free to jump in at any point. I think when that began to happen... well, two things. It could be approached prior to the meeting, the advocate could have met with the school administrator and say, okay, we're going

to meet with this parent and we know she's really unhappy. Let's talk about how we're going to approach it. Kind of, set the stage a little bit beforehand. If she got there and the parent started to do that, there is a number of different options. One option is just to look at the parent and say, it seems to me that you're hearts not in this right now. I'm not sure why. This is what I'm seeing. Would you like to postpone the meeting and come at another time? And I know there's schedules and all those things, but, what's important is to be able to connect to this parent. My sense, just in hearing it, that this someone who didn't have any hope that she had any role in that meeting whatsoever. Or maybe, the texting she was getting, she was being coached from a distance by someone. That's another possibility. So again, you know, becoming curious but also being able to say or talk to the principal and say, you know, I'm not sure that this is going how we planned it. Maybe we should stop and just reschedule it. You don't want to build more negative perceptions on the administrator's part. The other thing is to see if the parent was responding at all. So she was doing all this texting and stuff. Talk with her. Did she respond when she was spoken to or did she continue texting when her opinion was asked. Did she come forth with her opinion or not? All of those would decide whether she would be able to participate at that time or not.

>> I think what Isaura just said is real critical about the parent and the texting is you're not saying put it away, give me your attention, but, you're inviting the parent. Are you committed to this conversation right now? You know, took the energy, the emotional energy, physical energy to get here but it appears you're not participating so maybe this isn't a good time for you. So you're giving her the opportunity to either step out of the meeting and reschedule the meeting or make a commitment, i.e., stop texting, and be an active participant in the meeting. So you're giving her... and that's a respectful kind of way to deal with it. You're giving that parent options.

>> Yeah, ask yourself, what would it take for me to behave that way. What kind of pressure or stress would I need to be under to behave that way and we have all texted when we shouldn't have been texting, when we should have been listening. So we know the behavior. What does it take to get us there? The other thing that I just thought of, also I talked the advocate meeting with the administrator, advocates need to meet with parents, and I'm sure this advocate did, but, be real plain or be real forthright about, you know, we're going to work with this. These are some of the things the administrator is going to be looking for and it will increase the probability that he'll really believe you and pay attention to you if these things happen. Because, maybe, we don't know what the parent's history in dealing with authority figures. I would almost guarantee you that at that point she became 8, 9, 10 years old and she was in the principal's office once again. You know, become curious about why that behavior is manifesting itself and then, that will help direct, sort of, how you respond. I recognize it's a very difficult decision or scenario to deal with because, like you say, she wasn't expecting it. And it could also be something happened right before that meeting. If she didn't expect it and she's worked with

that parent and she knows the parent fairly well, maybe something happened right before the meeting. Which is another way to approach is to say... the thing about welcoming is when they walk in. I always remember a video. Lucinda and I did some of videos with some of her student for her class. I went over to California and I did skilled dialogue and then, they did scenarios. And this one student shows the scenario where a parent comes to see then and the parent, you know, it's in California and the place around the University was under construction and the parent finally got to the fourth-floor office or wherever she had to go to meet with the student. And the student jumps right into the meeting. The parent wants to just catch her breath, tell him what a terrible time it took to get there with the traffic and the construction and everything else. And so, welcoming allows you to say, you know, like, we're so glad you're here. How was your trip here? Was it okay? Is everything okay or is there something that we need to talk about? You still want to have the meeting? Because maybe something happened right before that meeting. It could be that someone that was close to her had just gone into the hospital and she was texting back and forth but she didn't feel she come out and say, not now. I can't have this meeting right now. I'm dealing with something else. Those are all things to explore That's a great scenario. And part of skilled dialogue is, kind of, having all of these strategies in a bag and then, pulling them out if needed. You know, it's not a sequential linear thing. It's learned sequentially but it's not implemented sequentially. And if something doesn't work, if she's not joining, go back to welcoming and see if, maybe, you missed something. See which strategies serve the purpose the best in a particular situation.

>> Okay. And we've got one more scenario that just came in. This will probably be the last one because I don't think we'll have time for much more after this.

>> Okay.

>>The scenario is when parents call our helpline, they sometimes have a need to just to unload, to tell a long story. We always respect that. If the calls though start coming repeatedly and the story is told is over and over again, we try to help the parent reach a point where the issues are bullet pointed and we try to steer them to looking at options for moving forward. Usually, this works but sometimes we just don't have the time at the moment of the call to stay on a lengthy call. Is the best way to start providing communication in writing so that things are more black and white?

>> It can be. That's certainly an option that you can use on top of anything else. Where I would go to is joining and I'll ask Cin in a minute to jump in, is joining. Typically, when parents feel that you can represent them, that you got it, they typically don't need to keep repeating it. There are disabilities and mental health issues that will keep someone repeating something but that's a different issue. So working on the joining strategy to reflect back to that parent and be able to say, here is what I'm hearing. Here is how I can represent that. Am I getting this? Or say, at this point, what do you want from me. And it may just be, I just to keep telling you this. One of the things that happens when someone has been traumatized, like a car accident. When you have a



car accident, even if it's a minor one, the first thing we do is we go tell everybody we run into. I just had a car accident. I was going on the freeway, blah, blah, blah. That's a way of releasing our stress. And it's okay to say, you know, it seems to be like you have a lot that you want to release at the moment, that you want to tell me about. How about you write it down for me and then, we can talk about it. That's another way to handle the situation. But again, become curious as to why they're doing that and once you know the why it becomes easier to choose the strategy. It sounds to me like probably joining. I know that sometimes when I call the cable company I will say the same thing over and over and over because I don't get, I can't hear my viewpoint in what they're telling me. And it's not the, I hear what you're saying because that never quite worked very well for me. But sometimes in different words repeating back and saying, you know, I'd be really upset about that too and I hear how upset you are. Sometimes it's not the content it's the emotional aspect of it. That's another way to go at it. Can you want to add something?

>> Well, I'm thinking, you know, what you've done already is putting it in bullets and, kind of, summarizing her concerns. I'm assuming that's what you did. And the language, very explicit language, like Isaura said of identifying what the concern. But my piece on this one, if the parent is calling and leaving it on an answering machine, the same story over and over again. Something is happening in that home or in the school, wherever the incident is occurring where this woman is reaching out. She's reaching out for an answering machine with hopefully there's somebody at the other end will listen and solve her problem. And the fact that she keeps doing this over and over again, something is prompting her to make that phone call again and again. And maybe perhaps, looking a little deeper other than her story is when does she call. A phone call saying, when you called yesterday, what was going on. What happened to prompt her to call and share again. Other than not being heard, something else is going on here. There's another piece to be uncovered.

>> Okay. Good point. The other thing that I forgot, if there is a cultural difference, if this woman comes from an indigenous culture or from a culture where face to face verbal interaction is the way things get done, then, she's going to keep calling because she's not getting that. And now, that we have phones, if you can Facetime, if you're actually connecting with her and it's not just an answering machine, Facetime so that she sees your face. You see her face. That might also help. Because if there's a cultural piece in there that's invalidating the oral word part. Okay. We're just about the end of this. The very last slide, just very quickly, you will see our book and you can get that from Balboa Press or Amazon, anything like that. We also listed a couple of other things. The last thing on there, Learn and Play tip a day, one of the tips has to do with skilled dialogue in that book, so, I put it on there. Lucinda and I are more than happy to talk about skilled dialogue until the cows come home. We love to that. And so, if you would like to work some more on this feel free to email us and just see where it goes from there. It has been

great. I really wish I could see and have more interaction with you. That's been a little frustrating at my end. I hope that you've gotten what you came for out of the meeting.

>> Thank you so much Lucinda and Isaura and thank everybody for joining us today. Please feel free to contact us with your questions or comment at any time. Also, please click on the link in the chat box and fill out a very brief survey to evaluate today's webinar. We greatly appreciate you taking a few minutes to do this. Our next webinar will take place in May and we'll introduce CADRE'S Part C Family Guide. It will be co-hosted by the Center for Parent Information and Resources. And more information about the webinar will be available on the CADRE website shortly. We look forward to you joining us in May. Thank you everybody. Have as wonderful day.

>> Bye, bye.