



USING GROUP DIALOGUE TO FACILITATE COMMUNICATION AND INCREASE PARTICIPATION ACROSS SOCIETY

Jonathan Drury (Sheffield Hallam University) & Dr. Elizabeth Milne (University of Sheffield)



Academy of Professional Dialogue ('Autism Dialogue'), Roffey Park, Oct 18. (photo: Jonathan Drury)

BOHM DIALOGUE

Bohm Dialogue takes the name of David Bohm FRS - an American theoretical physicist and quantum scientist (pictured). Bohm Dialogue is a generative form of group conversation, a free exchange of ideas and information, designed to dissolve fragmentation in collective and individual awareness and understanding and to encourage participation. (Bohm, 2013). Participants aim to reach a common understanding and experience everyone's point of view fully, equally and non-judgmentally. As such it provides a supportive environment to examine preconceptions and prejudices among peers, which can lead to a new and deeper understanding.



IMPLICATE ORDER THEORY

Bohm believed that the working of the brain, at the cellular level, obeyed the mathematics of some quantum effects, and postulated that thought is distributed and non-localised in the way that quantum entities do not readily fit into our model of space and time.

The Four Dialogic Practices

- AUTHENTIC VOICE - without pretence, finding one's own true voice
- LISTENING - without distraction to what is really being said
- RESPECT - without violation and ensuring things make sense to each other
- SUSPENSION - without certainty to nurture enquiries into one's own thinking

The Dynamic of Scaling

Integral to Dialogue are desired outcomes, agreed by participants at the outset via the practice of a (subjective) 'check-in'. Incorporating more intersubjective energy as the session and programme unfolds, the method of 'check-up' (part-way) and 'check-out' (at completion) is used as a type of self-scaling. This dynamic practice of self-enquiry could accompany and support a parallel study.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The aim of this pilot proposal is to identify the feasibility of enrolling delegates with a range of differing views into Bohm Dialogue sessions by measuring completion rates and delegate feedback, and to establish whether there is preliminary evidence that engaging in Bohm Dialogue may have a beneficial outcome. Based on this, we are keen to explore the potential value of Bohm Dialogue in the domain of Autism in a more formal manner. There are two aims of the proposed project:

- To spread awareness of Bohm Dialogue and engage people from a range of backgrounds including but not limited to: autistic adults, family members of autistic people, clinicians, educators, academics, third-sector employees, clinical commissioners and policy makers, in order to encourage them to attend Bohm Dialogue sessions.
- To carry out a pilot / feasibility study to investigate whether or not attending Bohm Dialogue sessions has a positive impact on delegates and whether this impact is equivalent in people with and without an autism diagnosis. As associated aim is to explore the barriers that may prevent autistic people attending a Bohm Dialogue and developing an accessible environment that will include as many people as possible.

KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Public engagement research is necessarily dialogic and therefore shaped by researchers' perceptions and beliefs. Researchers have described difficulties in engagement activities due to an interaction between substantive political differences within the autistic community and impairments specific to autism (Hollin & Pearce, 2017). Autistic people who do not speak or who communicate uniquely, also contribute to methodological and ethical challenges.

We believe that no similar work exists currently and Bohm Dialogue can form an important part of increasing understanding of autism and healthcare by facilitating communication between people with many differences, approaches and perspectives, including researchers.

"Dissensus needs to be recognised and embraced."

"Far greater effort needs to be invested in developing mechanisms and venues which allow fruitful dialogue."
(Hollin & Pearce, 2017)

References

Bohm, D. (2013). On dialogue. Routledge.
Hollin, G. and Pearce, W. (2018) Autism scientists' reflections on the opportunities and challenges of public engagement: a qualitative analysis. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders. ISSN 0162-3257 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3783-7>

METHOD OUTLINE

Fifty participants of roughly equal number of both autistic and non-autistic. Participants will be randomly allocated to the Bohm dialogue sessions or to the wait-list control.

Qualitative feedback will be gathered at the end of each run of sessions which we will use to gauge engagement and perceived value of the Bohm Dialogue sessions. We will also measure uptake, attendance and attrition. In addition the following variables will be measured before and after the Bohm Dialogue sessions:

Positive and Negative Affect Self-Compassion and Perceived Stress

EXPECTED OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Feedback from 14 sessions has highlighted that delegates have come away from the sessions feeling invigorated, challenged, and with a deeper understanding of the perspectives of other delegates. Delegates have also reported that the process of engaging in Dialogue resulted in a strong feeling of connection with others and an increase in positive affect.

The study and practice can be a platform for other studies requiring qualitative and quantitative data gathering in a sensitive, participatory environment. By evidencing the effect of Bohm Dialogue in the autism community and autistic people, we feel its application could be developed into other areas of health care, from service users to professionals and wider support networks. Public awareness of neurodiversity is increasing and autistic perception has major implications for society. Heuristic and narrative enquiry needs to be developed and we hope this study will be globally recognised.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS (20 items) is a widely used self-report measure of positive and negative affect with good to excellent psychometric properties (Crawford & Henry, 2004). Samson, Huber, and Gross (2012) administered the PANAS to 27 autistic adults and 27 demographically-matched non-autistic adults, and found the autistic adults had significantly higher negative affect, i.e. emotions, such as fear, anxiety and frustration.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS, Cohen and Williamson, 1988). The PSS (10 items) is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is designed to measure how unpredictable, overloaded or uncontrollable participants find their lives. Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2017) have found that PSS scores are significantly higher in autistic adults than in non-autistic controls.

The 12-item Self Compassion Scale – Short Form (SCS-SF, Raes et al. 2011)

References

Bishop-Fitzpatrick, L., Minshew, N. J., Mazefsky, C. A., & Eack, S. M. (2017). Perception of life as stressful, not biological response to stress, is associated with greater social disability in adults with autism spectrum disorder. Journal of autism and developmental disorders, 47(1), 1-16.
Raes, F., Pommier, E., Neff, K. D., & Van Gucht, D. (2011). Construction and factorial validation of a short form of the self-compassion scale. Clinical psychology & psychotherapy, 18(3), 250-255.
Samson, A. C., Huber, O., & Gross, J. J. (2012). Emotion regulation in Asperger's syndrome and high functioning autism. Emotion, 12, 659-665. doi:10.1037/a0027975.
Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: the PANAS scales. J Pers Soc Psychol, 54, 1063-1070.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following for their support in this proposal: all participants in previous Autism Dialogue sessions, Peter Garrett, Jane Ball and the Academy of Professional Dialogue, The Autism Centre at Sheffield Hallam University, University of Sheffield Autism Research Lab, Katie Owens, Hester Reeve, Scottish Autism, Sheffield Autistic Society, Sheffield Quaker Meeting House.

ANALYSIS

Primarily, this is a feasibility to study, aimed at investigating whether Bohm Dialogue is an acceptable framework for developing open dialogue about health and well-being. Uptake to the dialogue sessions, and attrition over the course of the three sessions will be therefore measured.

In addition, we intend to gain preliminary evidence to investigate whether attending Bohm Dialogue sessions may be useful in improving affect, increasing self-compassion and reducing perceived stress in autistic and non-autistic people. Anecdotal evidence from previous Bohm Dialogue sessions on the topic of autism suggest that this might be the case.

Prior to planning a full trial, and alongside investigating feasibility, we will measure these three constructs both before and after participating in the Bohm Dialogue sessions.

Participants will be split into two groups: one that starts the Bohm Dialogue sessions straight away (group 1) and the other "wait-list control" group who wait for three months before starting the sessions (group 2). Exploratory repeated-measures ANOVAs will be carried out comparing scores on the PANAS, the PSS and the SCS-SF at T1 and T2. Group (autistic or not) will also be entered as a between-subjects variable.

TIMEFRAME

	Group 1	Group 2
Month 1	Participant Recruitment Assembly of required materials Participants allocated to Group 1 or 2 All participants complete questionnaires (T = 1)	
Month 2	BD 1	
Month 3	BD 2	
Month 4	BD 3	
Month 4	All participants complete questionnaires (T=2)	
Month 4		BD 1
Month 5		BD 2
Month 6		BD 3
Month 6	All participants complete questionnaires (T = 3)	
Month 7	Data Entry, Data Analysis	
Month 8	Dissemination of results, manuscript preparation	
Month 9	Manuscript preparation	

Key: BD = Bohm Dialogue session

ETHICS

This project will be submitted to the relevant ethics board for approval.

The Bohm Dialogue sessions will be run by Mr Jonathan Drury, a trained and experienced Bohm Dialogue facilitator and aligns with participatory ethos of autism research. Mr. Drury has gained trust as a leader of this work, both with autistic delegates and autism professionals.

Safeguarding is provided by the Safeguarding Policy of the Sheffield Autistic Society and risk assessments are standard practice in the work.

FREEDOM TO OPERATE / CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Mr Drury is a member of the Academy of Professional Dialogue, an registered charity. He is simultaneously preparing an unconnected paper on autism for publication and use by the Academy. He does not act as a consultant for, nor earn any revenue from the Academy. Part of the project will involve measuring whether involvement in Bohm Dialogue has a positive effect on delegates' affect and perceived stress. As such, the project may, or may not, generate data that endorses Bohm Dialogue. Mr Drury, as named researcher on the application will be involved in data entry, but will not be responsible for data collection or analysis. This will be carried out by Dr Milne who has no affiliation with the Academy of Professional Dialogue. In order to ensure complete transparency in our approach, all (anonymised) data will be made available for re-analysis after the study is complete, and the research will be pre-registered via EGAP - a general registry for social science research. The research will not use materials that are subject to patents. Licence fees for questionnaire usage will be paid (where applicable). No elements of the research are likely to lead to intellectual property issues or restrictions.



Please contact for further details of this proposal: autismdialogue@gmail.com www.autismdialogue.org tel: 07754 910156 Sheffield UK 2018