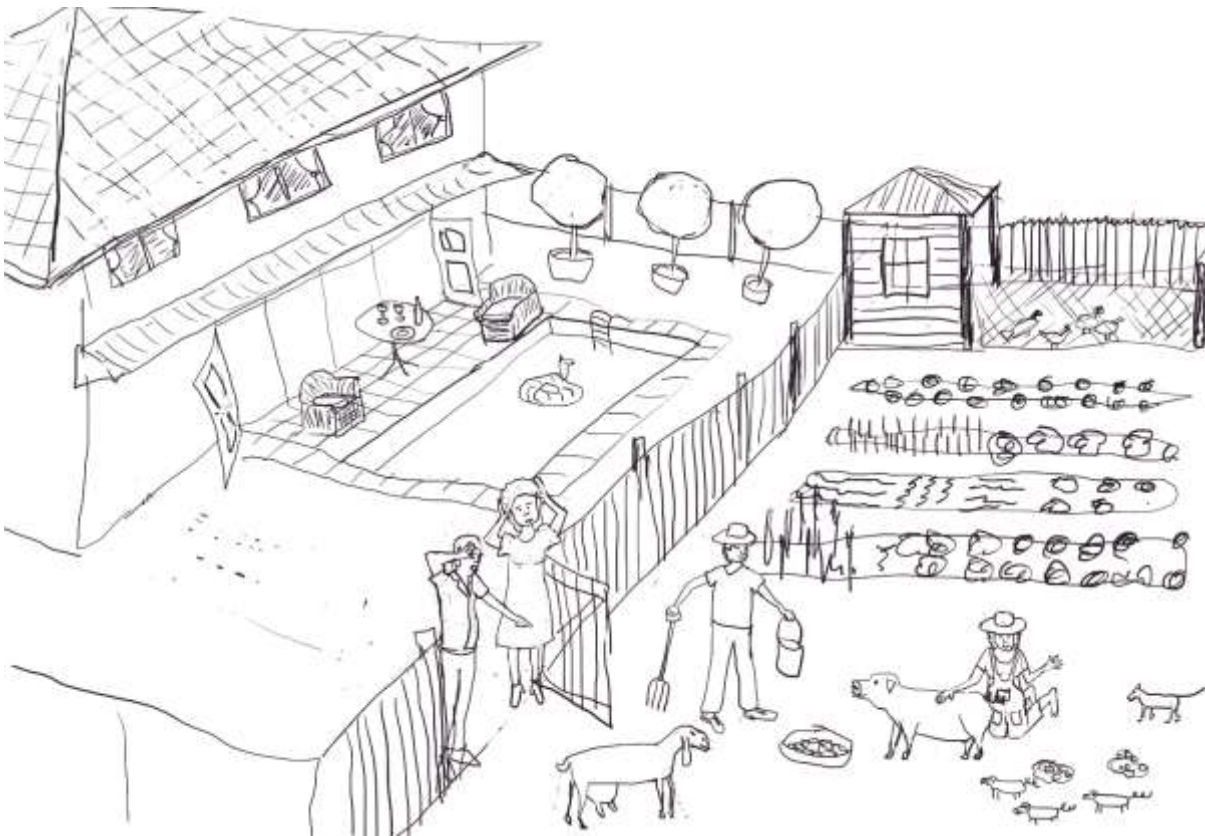




## Chapter 19

# The Good Life

Back when I was a kid a show on TV called ‘The Good Life’ was one of my favourites. It was about a couple who gave up their traditional jobs to try to be self-sufficient on their own house block in a city. A key part of the humour was to do with their friendship with their upper class next door neighbours who disapproved of their new lifestyle and the impact it had on their upper class image. In a way my life has resonated with this story. While at points in my life I could be accused of being more like the upper class neighbours I have tried for the most part to break away from the mainstream to embrace a simpler more sustainable self-sufficient lifestyle in opposition to the traditional capitalist controlling competitive orientation. I have also tried (sometimes successfully) to involve friends, family and neighbours in this process.



I have done this in part because it was an enjoyable, it is actually a ‘good’ life. However it has also been to embrace the way I think people ‘should’ be living to achieve a more equitable sustainable society. In this way the ‘good life’ has more



of a moral imperative. I wanted to live ethically, to have a congruence between my ideals and my behaviour.

In this chapter I will try to get much more specific about how to implement these ideals in our relationships and the way we speak to others. As I have mentioned earlier in this book, it is very common amongst practitioners to behave more like the system they are trying to change, than the ideal system being advocated. I need at a personal level to try to embody the processes of the ideal world I am trying to create. This should be evident in my current relationships and in the way I talk to those around me. I need a communication style that is not hierarchical or elitist and which encourages sustainability.

I am still struggling to achieve this congruence between my ideals and my speech, so I am not reporting on what I have already done, but looking to the future to how I can improve. Ultimately the ‘good’ society will be manifest in our relationships and in the way we communicate with each other. While having grand plans for how the societal power structures should change, I need at the same time to apply this to and within myself.

I will talk briefly about relationships but feel this has already been fairly well covered in this book and will concentrate more on, what “good” communication looks like.

### **Mutual relationships**

I have made it clear that I want to avoid controlling, exchange and alienation relationships and to build more mutual relationships with both people I am working with and also those who I am seeking to challenge. This involves recognizing that we are all interdependent. It means seeking collaboration rather than control. It means caring for the group rather than operating out of self-interest.

I want to have mutual relationships not just with people, but to apply this same orientation to the environment as well, to recognize my interdependence within the whole ecology and to relate more creatively with the environment rather than to try to control the environment. I need to learn from the environment, and not impose my ideas on the environment.

It is relatively easy to have mutuality when it’s a shared orientation but it is difficult to hold on to this perspective when it is not reciprocated, when others are seeking to control you, to be dependent on you or to ignore you. When the other does not share a mutual intent they will perhaps see your behaviour as



challenging, conflictual or just annoying. If you are able to share the philosophy behind your actions, the other may be able to understand your intent, but it is rare to get such opportunities. The hope is if you can hold on to your mutual orientation the other may eventually begin to recognize this and or they may start to mirror your behaviour. This however often takes a lot of time and so is more likely to be successful in long term relationships.

This is why mutuality is more common in family relationships and long term friendships. It often takes a generation for a person to learn about mutuality. In a loving family young children feel valued and connected. Mutuality exists unconsciously for the child. Teenagers begin to assert their independence and separateness wanting to control others around them. Then as adults, they can 'partner up' in self-consciously interdependent, relationships where mutuality develops over time. The adult learns the ability to be both autonomous and interdependent at the same time, hopefully in time to pass this on to the next generation. In our hierarchical controlling society I think this intergenerational building and understanding of mutuality is unfortunately in decline. Many of our leaders in business and politics fail to mature and understand mutuality remaining as self-interested teenagers

I suspect the stability of first nation's community and culture allowed the strengthening of mutual bonds between people and between people and the environment. It meant a mutual philosophy was built up and reinforced with each succeeding generation. The Elders job was to help new generations recognize and understand all their mutual connections to land and to their people. To recognize the way each person had their own autonomy (and responsibility) while still being interdependent with everyone and the whole environment, and to recognize the importance of the responsibility to pass this on to the next generation.

In our current society one way to help rebuild mutual relationships is by setting up new structures (lifeboats) that embrace mutual relationships and so which give people a taste of something different to the more familiar controlling relationships of the dominant hierarchical system. Explicitly embracing consensus decision making helps to reinforce a different relationship.

We could explore more actions, programs and strategies to encourage mutuality, but in this chapter I want to shift from the macro to the micro to focus not on the broader strategies but on the actual style of talking or communicating. I have from the outset made it clear I believe everything is connected and everything is actually enfolded in every part. In this way I think we can analyse every utterance we make to see if it is encouraging change towards the 'good' life or



supporting the status quo. I want my communication with others to be in some small way a congruent reflection of social change processes in action. While the broader long term strategies are critical ‘in theory’ to the future of what sort of relationships we can have, how we talk to others today reveals our ambitions ‘in practice’. All the discussion about a new ideal society will be for nought, if the way we talk to others is controlling and hierarchical.

I have often noticed that many activists could espouse ideals close to my heart and describe their nonviolent practice principles which I also supported and yet in their relationships and ways of talking to people were very controlling and strategic. I find this contradiction very disappointing and dispiriting. Consistence and congruence is so very important to me. It is of course particularly challenging when I focus my critique on my own behaviour and can see the extent of my own contradictory controlling impulses and behaviour. All the lofty ideals need to be manifest in the ways I talk in all situations. I want to learn and adopt a way of talking that reflects my ideals. I want ‘good’ talk and I want to be able to share with others and explore together how we can all talk in ‘better’ ways.

### ‘Good’ Communication

Beyond all the particular actions we can do individually and together, what should a ‘good’ conversation look like? What should it look like with people who share similar values? What should it look like with people who oppose these values?

Despite my ambition to be a good communicator, I know my style is a product of the hierarchical context I live within, and my particular upbringing. Growing up in my family it was a battle for the airways and everyone would interrupt each other getting louder to get heard. There was no hierarchical control but it was a competitive environment with our parents encouraging us to assert ourselves. We could all talk at once and also amazingly seem to listen in on these multiple conversations. I was amazed when I realized Michelle’s family took turns to speak.

My social work training made me a better communicator than I would have been otherwise. I have worked at listening more, and focusing on what others want to talk about and to wait for my turn. I am much more sensitive to controlling practices in conversations and meetings and to trying to encourage a more equal sharing.

Unfortunately over the last few years my hearing has deteriorated and I can no longer hear particular frequencies. This means I find it particular hard to



understand the higher pitch of many female voices and particularly soft voices. I find it almost impossible to understand anyone on the phone. It is better if I can see people lips moving. So, just as I am trying to become a better communicator, I have been saddled with a disability which makes some of the basics of good communication more difficult for me personally.

As a shy person I also can get self-conscious and tongue-tied in conversations particularly with new people and I can say stupid things, as words come out in the wrong order. Sometimes I am not very quick on my feet conversationally, often thinking afterwards ‘why did I say that?’ or why didn’t I say this?’ I know my deafness, slowness and shyness will hold me back, but I am still keen to see if I can learn to let go of “bad” ways of talking learnt from being immersed in this western capitalist culture and to try to speak ‘better’ in a way that encourages mutuality.

To explore this issue we need a way to understand communication. I want to share a few concepts to aid the discussion. All conversations regardless of their purpose or meaning are basically made up of questions, reflections and statements with both people listening (to varying degrees) to what the other is saying. I want to pick up on an idea I came across 25 years ago and to try to extend it a bit further to help me work out how I can communicate more congruently. I want to look at Karl Tomm’s categorization of questions which he developed in the context of family therapy, and apply it to social action and everyday life<sup>1</sup>. I also want also to apply these ideas beyond the use of ‘questions’ to also categorize ‘statements’ ‘reflections’ and ‘Listening’ (and later to paintings as well). I think these concepts will be a useful tool to help clarify the components of ‘good’ communication. (At the back end of this book it seems a little of my academic training is seeping in)

## Questions

Karl Tomm talks about 4 different types of questions, linear, circular, strategic and reflexive.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Tomm Interventive Interviewing:Part III. Intending to Ask Linear, Circular, Strategic, or Reflexive Questions? Family Process. vol 27, nos 2 , march 1988

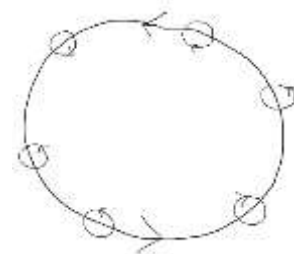


Linear is by far the most common type of questioning in our everyday life. Linear questions are generally ‘closed’ requiring only a short yes or no answer. They tend to be used to gather specific information about the other. How old are you? Where do you live? We often ask linear questions when we first meet someone or when we need information quickly. They are used to establish basic information about others, the ‘facts’. A doctor asks a series of linear questions to narrow down your probable illness, based on their knowledge of various symptoms. By using a string of linear questions, the questioner is very much in control of the direction of the conversation, focusing on topics of interest to the questioner.



If you have a mechanistic causal view of the world (where the effect of one thing on another can be isolated) you will tend to predominately use linear questions. “Why did you do that?” “Who is responsible for this disaster?” “Who started this fight?” If the facts can be established, so can the cause of problems and a remedy can then be put in place. Linear questions are the modus operandi of hierarchical control systems and controlling relationships. “Did you collect the money? How many customers did you see today? Who is going to take the blame for this stuff up?” “How can we make this machine go faster?”

Circular questions are much more common in counselling settings and friendships, where people are more interested in relationships and how people are getting along. The goal is to understand interactions, meanings and feelings. These questions tend to be more ‘open’ questions inviting longer answers. “Why do you feel this way? What has your relationship been like? How are you feeling about retirement?” Given an expected longer answer, circular questions also suggest ‘the asker’ will listen carefully to the response without interruption. They give more space and control over the direction of the conversation to the person being asked the question.

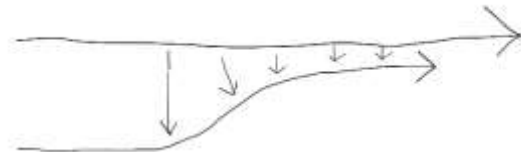


If you have a view of the world that everyone is interdependent and connected, then you will probably ask more circular questions. These questions are not looking for a cause but rather to understand everyone’s involvement and the feelings and meanings of the people involved. “What was David’s reaction when you told him?” “What is your relationship like now?” While currently more common in close mutual relationships there is no reason they could not be used



more in the workplace and in scientific discussion. They are a common style of questioning in ecological science where the interactions between all elements of the ecology are being considered. <sup>2</sup>

Strategic questions are leading questions, where the asker is inviting the listener to see the world in a particular way. “So Bob did this to you without permission?” “Who benefits the most from all your hard work?” “Do you think you deserve your bonus?” Strategic questions are trying to influence people in a particular direction, generally reflecting the world view of the asker. Marxists and feminists ask strategic questions to help people understand their own oppression, as part of a process often called ‘conscientization’. However strategic questions are not just a vehicle for the left side of politics. Right wingers will also use strategic questions to lead people to their way of thinking. “Should your Taxes be spent on people who are not serious about looking for work?” “If we let them do this, what will be the next freedom they take away from us?”



Reflexive questions invite a more creative response. They are not focused on just gathering information but they instead encourage the person to come up with new ideas. These questions often require the answerer to use their imagination, to see themselves in a different position. “If you were in her shoes what would you have said?” “If you were rich, would you have done the same thing?” By getting someone to imagine themselves in an unfamiliar situation or a situation in which they have more power, it can encourage them to understand alternative perspectives, but moreover it can lead them to coming up with unexpected solutions. “If you were in your boss’s shoes what would you have said? “If you were a First Nation’s person what would you have thought when Europeans settled on your country?”



Linear and strategic questions tend to be directive and based on the theories and assumptions held by the questioner. In the case of linear questions the theory informing the questions is not shared, it is part of the questioner’s expertise. Strategic questions tend to lead to a more explicit sharing and understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> Stereotypically the bread winners (traditionally men) ask more linear, while the caregivers (traditionally women) ask more circular questions.



the world, but still based on assumptions that the questioner brings to the conversation. The questioner wants the other to adopt their world view.

The circular and reflexive questions are less directive and more about finding out the others theories and ideas. There is a much bigger effort required in listening and being open to new ideas held by others. With reflexive questions there is a bigger possibility of new creative ideas for the answerer, but this can also stimulate the creativity of the questioner. It can lead to new ideas for both people.

Not surprisingly I am going to be advocating for greater use of reflexive questions, but it would be impossible carry on a regular conversation in this way. All four types of questions have their place, Linear for gathering basic information, circular for understanding feelings and relationships, strategic for developing a more structural analysis and reflexive for developing new understandings and creative solutions. The extent to which you favour a particular type of question can suggest a particular orientation or world view. For example, a controlling person at the top of a hierarchy will be asking a lot of closed linear questions.

Thinking about my own communication I know I use a lot of linear questions. In this way I am reinforcing the communication style generated by a hierarchical controlling structure. I need to ask more circular and reflexive questions. Too often I assume an understanding of other people's situation without properly exploring and understanding their specific situation and their own understanding and insights. I let busyness and other excuses stop me asking more questions and listening harder to understand better. I am often caught up in my own way of seeing the world rather than being open to alternatives. In particular I need to try to use reflexive and circular questions when dealing with hierarchical structures. Rather than just operating within their communication framework I could challenge in a small, way their methods and processes by asking more of these questions. "What is it like for you working for this company?" "How are decisions made in your team? If you were in our shoes how would you try to change the decision?"

## Statements

Tomm's four styles of questions can also be extended and applied to statements.

Linear statements have an implied causal view of the world, where the speaker assumes what they are saying can and will affect the behaviour of others. The speaker assumes their statements are based on 'the truth' and so not open to question or challenge. "The free market is the best system". This is very obvious





in hierarchies, but I also notice people making statements like this to neighbours and friends and it highlights the way the controlling attitude of the system has permeated informal friendships and neighbourhood relationships.

Circular statements are less common, but are about sharing understandings of the relationship and interaction between things. This may be to counter a linear view which say blames one side for a fight. “I think this was a retaliation for previous abuse”. People who offer circular statements are often focused on maintaining relationships and harmony amongst peers and work mates. They tend to react to blaming statements looking to understand of how everyone is involved in creating the situation. “It is great when we all listen to each other, we come up with much better solutions when we do so”

Strategic statements are very common, particularly in educational settings and work places where the statement maker is trying to get others to subscribe to their world view. It is rare to listen to a politician and detect anything other than strategic statements. “You will all be better off with our Tax plan.” Lectures at Uni are often long strategic statements designed to move the students to the lecturer’s view of the world. Similarly my art is often a strategic statement where the political message is fairly clear or lurking in the background.

A reflexive statement will often also sound like a question as the statement is often followed by a long pause, to allow the other to think about what is being said. In my own lectures at uni I would try to curtail the strategic quality by highlighting contradictions or limits to my own positions, so as to encourage the creativity of students. I think the lecturers who I thought had wisdom, used more reflexive statements encouraging students to think for themselves. The riddles of sages tend to be reflexive statements. Some wise or reflexive statements have been repeated so many times they become trite. Nevertheless people can continue to find new inspiration in such statements over time, even hanging such statements on the wall. “A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle”. “Let no man pull you low enough to hate him (Martin Luther King)”. “Be the change”.

## Reflections

Reflections are less common in everyday speech. Counsellors are trained to use reflections as it shows their clients that they are listening. They also provide a way to check you have actually heard correctly. Getting in to the habit of using reflections, encourages you to listen very closely.



Reflections can try to sum up several different points or even the whole conversation. For example you might say to me “so Col your book is basically an attempt to understand society by looking at your own history?” Alternately you could be more focused, to check you have heard a particular statement correctly. “So a reflection shows you are listening?” Reflections could be seen as just a sub set of questions, but they also a verbalization of your listening, of what you have heard.

This active form of listening is underutilized in everyday conversation, but it is generally appreciated by others as it shows you are really thinking about what they are saying. For many people this can be a rare and welcome experience. Reflections also allow the other to correct and further clarify what they are saying and so it can help them to express themselves more fully and clearly. In therapeutic situation just doing this can lead people to come to a better, clearer understanding of their own situation and maybe to their own new insights. Reflection can also help in confrontational situations to make sure both parties are not misconstruing what the other is saying. Correcting these misunderstanding can reduce the conflict.

Reflections can be described in the same 4 categories described by Tomm. I will use the Men’s Shed and LOCO as an example. Linear reflections involve repeating what facts have been established. “So they made repeated attempts to force you out”. A circular reflection will focus less on the specific information and look at the meanings, feelings, interactions and relationships. “So it sounds like you found them to be aggressive”. Strategic reflection will pull out the elements discussed that fit with the questioners theories or interpretation. “So you are saying their connection to the Liberal party put you in a less powerful position”. A reflexive reflection highlights uncertainties and inconsistencies that encourages creativity. “You seem to be suggesting things could have been different if you reacted differently”.

While reflection shows you are listening, it also directs the person towards what the listener is hearing and so what they think is important from what is being said. So while not as direct as a statement they still bring something of the questioners own way of seeing the world.

## Active Listening

Listening is often a neglected skill in conversations, with often both participants eager to make their own statements and not really taking in what the other is



saying. Getting in the habit of offering reflections helps to stop thinking about what you want to say next, and to continue to actively listen to what the other is saying. Active listening involves really trying to understand and make sense of what the other is saying, and ideally in the way the speaker understands things (rather than your own interpretations). If anyone has ever listened to you in this way you will know it is a nice experience.

Despite my training and intent, I am a terrible listener. I quickly react to something the other has said, leading me to my own thoughts and things I want to say, and so only half hearing what is being said. I like coming up with new ideas and can quickly drift in to my own theorizing. I have to work hard at suppressing my own thinking, to keep listening fully. It is very hard work for me particularly with my deafness I can lose track of group conversations and withdraw in to my own thoughts. I need to work harder to try to piece together and understand the others views from the different things they are saying rather than relying on my own theories. I have to try to work out what theory is implied in their conversation, rather than imposing mine. Fortunately for a naturally bad listener like me, it is a technique that can be learnt.

I believe that regardless of how good a listener you are, what you hear is effected by your own world views and so there is always to some extent a filtering process going on, where your view of the world impacts on what you can hear. You can listen for facts (linear), meanings (circular), analysis (strategic) or novelty (reflexive). A conversation is a dance with both people influencing the flow and direction, but if you want to let the other lead as is common in therapeutic conversations you need to try to not just listen through your own filters but to actually shift focus to try to understand the other person's filters, to try to make sense of their perspective and whether they are using more linear, circular, strategic or reflexive statements and so then to perhaps connect with them by using questions, statements and reflections that match their way of seeing the world. This is what good counsellors are able to do. They speak to clients from within the clients world view. However it is also what the best con artists do. So active listening it is a technique which can be used for good or bad purposes.

Developing this 'therapeutic' understanding also helps in challenging the views of the other. Many change agents are not interested in understanding their opponent's world view, but to be a good change agent also involves not just rhetoric but a genuine attempt to understand the others position and then engage in a dialogue where you try to challenge their views from within their own framework. The possibility of introducing them to a different way of seeing the



world will be enhanced if you better understand their starting place. To understand this starting place, begins with a focus on listening. I am struck by how critical I think this is to effective change and yet how hard I find it to do. It is so difficult but necessary, if you genuinely want to have a proper dialogue, to keep going back to other people's starting points

## Relationships

I think the above understanding of communication can also be applied to relationships. Through this text I have looked at relationships through the lens of whether they are controlling, alienated, exchange or mutual and I have been wanting to encourage more mutual relationships. Tomm's categories also provide another way to think about relationships.

I immediately can recognize how so many of my relationships are strategic or linear. I tend to spend time with the people I am working with and to build relationships with people who can assist in that work. I am not very good at keeping contact with old friends. I feel awful about this. While my shyness makes me hesitate about contact with others and building new relationships, I am more likely to do so when it coincides with my commitments and ideals. I don't like being like this. I need to be more circular and reflexive in decisions about forming new relationships, being open to letting relationships develop along other paths and to take me to unexpected places.

I have friends who will chat with anyone they come across sometimes leading to unexpected connections. For some this is strategic, and part of their business orientation, a way of uncovering useful information and new possibilities. For others it is just because they are genuinely interested in other people. I would like to be more like this latter group of friends. I should spend more time getting to know people who I meet by chance without any agenda. It could potentially assist my change objectives as I may well come across unexpected kindred spirits (See, I slip so easily back in to being strategic!)

In a similar way I need to listen to and learn from my environment. Rather than just using nature in an instrumental, linear or strategic way for my own agenda, I need to be more open, circular, and reflexive in this relationship to just appreciate it for itself and to better understand it, its patterns and processes and the relationships between different animals and plants. Rather than barreling in, with little understanding to fashion nature to fit with my own agenda, I need to really understand and listen to the nature around me and to fit in with these patterns and



processes. The introduced European approach to agriculture decimated a balanced and productive ecosystem in just a few generations. I want to approach things differently.

### **Bringing it all together**

I am seeking an answer to the question “How can I communicate to others in a way that reflects the more ideal society I am seeking?” A society which is egalitarian, environmentally enhancing and a consensus based flat democratic system. I am also seeking a way of communicating which is different to and can challenge and change our existing hierarchical controlling environmentally destructive society and the way of talking that follows with this.

From the outset it is important to remember that communication is a two or more way process. I can't 'control' it and I cannot be sure what impact my attempts at a more ideal style of communication will lead. Communication is a creative dance between people. So in no way am I attempting to offer a recipe for how things should be done, like an 'ideal' communication check list. I am offering some suggestions for what I think could make things better, particularly for myself and some clues about understanding how to make 'bad' communication better. The tug of war analogy applies here also, you can try to encourage a certain style of communication, but it may well be ignored and resisted, but you can keep pulling, trying to make it 'better'.

I will begin by discussing what I think is a more ideal way of communicating with people who share a similar orientation using Balaangala as an example and then to take this up a level to look more closely at how to speak to those with an opposite orientation, how to talk to the supporters of inequality, hierarchy power and control.

### **Yarning - Talk with kindred spirits**

Within the Balaangala group there is a strong commitment amongst a few members to embracing more culturally consistent and appropriate communication processes and to learning from the long history of a very stable flat governance system. 'Yarning' for me has become much more than just another name for discussion, it now carries with it a commitment to a different process of conversation in meetings. As a group we want to adopt a “good” approach to dialogue amongst ourselves and also when we organize workshops



and talks for the wider community. This ‘good’, culturally consistent communication is just as relevant to a 2 person or 100 person conversation and I will try to identify some of its possible elements.

I am not sure how and why First Nation’s people have embraced the word yarning to describe their way of communicating, but for me yarn relates to string and it emphasises that it is about connecting things, perhaps weaving and interconnecting different stories to make something new and productive. This is in contrast to ‘talking’ which can sound like a one sided affair. Our European culture has a history of talking and taking over, while First Nations’s people yarn and find connections. The yarning process has much to teach us and I want to build on it to capture what I think ‘good’ talk looks like.

### The yarning process

It is very common in any culture for conversation to begin with some informal chit chat to help people feel comfortable in the social context, to welcome new people and to introduce people to each other. In business contexts this is often very quickly done. In First Nation’s culture, this is a necessary and extended process, it becomes part of the business of the meeting.

In yarning circles, people begin by saying what ‘country’ they are from, and their family connections. These statements move around the circle not necessarily in order, till everyone has identified themselves. These are ‘circular’ statements which give a quick snapshot of your connections to the land and to the people. The connection to the land and place is very important to First Nations people, it is a key aspect of their identity. It also makes clear the authority of certain people if the yarn is taking place on their country, and so the more ‘visitor’ status of people from other areas. If speaking on their own country, it will generally fall to these people to welcome everyone, to do a ‘welcome to country’. If no one is present from the country where the yarn is taking place someone, generally a more senior person or elder will begin the meeting with a ‘acknowledgement of country’. This also helps to orientate people to remember the history of the place and to reflect on connections to land, place and the whole environment.

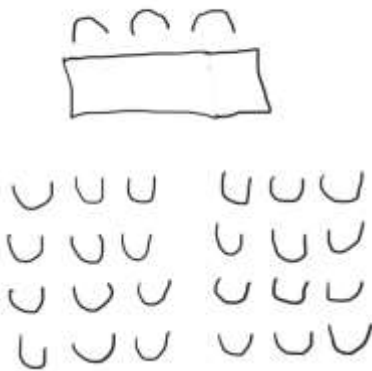
This protocol for discussion should be important to all People living here in Australia and an acknowledgement or welcome is becoming a more standard tradition in many institutions including Australian Parliaments. As a kid in school we acknowledged the Queen, it is terrific to see the shift to acknowledging First Nations people. Some of this has become routinized but it should on each



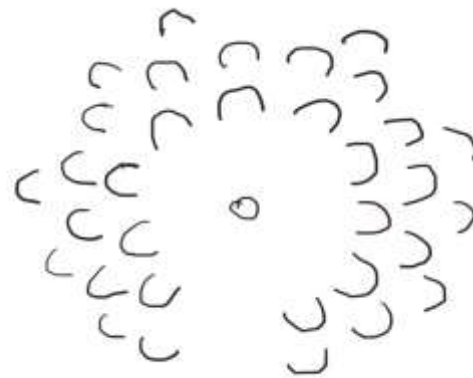
occasion encourages us to reflect on our shared history and to recognize that non indigenous people are all living on land that was taken without treaty or permission and in doing so have benefited from this dispossession. Given this, I think as ‘settlers in this country’ we should say where our ancestors came from and where our family first settled and so our connection to the dispossession. We must then accept our visitor status and show respect to the local custodians in any yarn.

To facilitate the yarn, it is of course a lot easier if everyone can sit in a circle where everyone can see each other. In bigger groups this may involve circles inside each other. This is very different to linear rows of seats facing the chair person and to meetings where people begin with saying what their work position and role is.

Traditional seating



Yarning seating



It is critical to show respect and pay attention during this process of sharing where you are from. The speaker also needs to show respect to the group by not speaking for too long, and to take into account the numbers present, so as to allow time for everyone. Long statements could be perceived as an attempt to colonize or dominate the airways. We need to share the airways also.

The circle captures the non-hierarchical structure of the yarn. The local custodians do not sit at the front table at the meeting and assume a more powerful position (as happens in the western tradition). The welcome is in part an invitation to join in the discussion fully as a valued guest, to share equally while also remembering the ‘visitor’ status.

Having had a welcome and acknowledgement and perhaps shared around the circle where everyone is from, it is common for meetings these days even



amongst first nation's people to just proceed like a regular formal meeting even perhaps adopting western processes of voting and 'majority rules'. This highlights the colonizing influence of western thinking. I want to suggest the meeting structure should continue to follow this circular process, except this time now that people know where each other is from, they can start to share more of their own views. Each person's views should be treated with respect and listened to. This means asking questions and offering reflections to see you have understood what they are saying, also allowing them to extend or even change what they are saying. (In regular meetings people often rely on the meeting chair or facilitator to do this, but in a yarn it should be everyone's role). The discussion should continue till everyone gets the chance to speak and be heard (properly listened to). Time limits may push things along but time constraints should not be used to force decisions and to close down discussion. The First nations yarning style is to keep talking rather than to impose decisions. Consensus is an explicit objective and this can take time and many meetings.

Sitting in a circle allows and encourages everyone to co-facilitate whereas when everyone is in rows looking to the front, the chair of the meeting is in control. The Chair has eye contact with everyone, while the meeting attendees mainly can only see other people backs. Unfortunately our buildings have often been designed with these controlled meetings in mind. Church buildings and lecture theatres are a classic examples. Fortunately at Balaangala we have most events outside and we have as a group agreed to set up chairs in a circle and avoid rows, so as to create a structure which better facilitates sharing, consensus and shared facilitation.

Many change agents call for structural change but often miss the ways they can implement micro structural change just by changing the shape of seating. Meeting outside takes this a step further, it helps everyone to remain connected to the ground and to keep the environment in mind. In comparison, when you meet inside an air-conditioned square plaster box, it is harder to remember nature. In this way the environment is also a participant in our Balaangala meetings. A bird flying through or squawking will attract everyone's attention and remind people of our connection to the land. A noisy car driving by also helps to remind of the intrusion and damage we have done to nature.

Sitting in a circle means everyone has eye contact with each other and can assess people's reactions to what others are saying. Most communication is nonverbal and so everyone has access to picking up from nonverbal cues the general mood and if particular statements are being strongly supported or perhaps causing





offence. This also means if anyone is not listening properly and being distracted or talking to their neighbour it will be very distracting for everyone not just the speaker. While a person may not be saying anything they can be actively communicating (often unintentionally) a lack of respect or opposition. So active listening becomes key to showing respect and everyone can play a role to minimize distractions and bringing people back to the group focus.

Sitting in a circle and catching up with a group of friends the conversation or yarn may meander in any direction. When there is an explicit issue or agenda to be discussed there is a need to keep everyone on track. Questions and reflections can be used to ensure people are not wandering from the issue at hand, or moreover to establish how what seems at first sight to be unrelated to the issue is in fact pertinent to the discussion. To do so requires careful listening and reflection by all involved to work well. If only one person is really reflecting and listening, they will start to look like the facilitator or leader. When everyone adopts the facilitation role of keeping everyone else on track, it is more likely the conversation will stay on track in the first place. Everyone is focused on the task at hand. We all need to learn to be better meeting facilitators rather than just seeing ourselves as just participants, to ensure better egalitarian yarns

In the discussion people will be trying to influence each other through linear and strategic questions, reflections and statements as well as trying to explore in a more open way through circular and reflexive statements each other positions. In a yarn we want people to share their views but also to listen to and understand the others views. This is the basis of proper collaboration as people try to find common ground and to achieve consensus about an issue.

If someone is becoming less open to other ideas and just promoting their own, the group needs to do two things. Rather than ignoring their views the task is to explore their ideas even more closely, by listening more fully and reflecting on the value of their position but then seeking to encourage their openness by the group shifting focus to listen hard to an alternative view. Having fully heard someone's position identifying some of the limits of their position and the aspects not addressed can also help to get them to further develop their ideas. The other job of the group is to lift up and value the variety of ideas that may exist by giving focus to those who have different views. This is particularly important if these people have not been allowed much space to speak previously.

At the same time, the process I am advocating does not pressure people to speak. It is important to leave room for those who have not 'had a say' but people need to speak when they are ready and not be forced. Everyone should be scanning



the circle to check non verbals and to recognize when someone is trying to find a space to talk. Often in a group, the right to speak is signalled by eye contact. The talkative people can start to just look at each other. To open the discussion up is not just about leaving space at the end when the talkative people have finished. It is also about letting people in during the exchange, even interrupting to make space for someone else. The airways need to be considered like the last piece of cake. Rather than hogging the airways, everyone needs to focus on sharing them.

### Consensus

In a 'majority rules' governance structure there is no need for the above process to occur. As long as you have the votes of more than half the group you can get your way, discussion is not actually required. The supporters don't even have to agree with you, you may have done some deal to get their support by giving them something else. This sounds very undemocratic and manipulative, but it is the very basis of our parliamentary democracy. Consensus on the other hand as a governance structure reinforces and supports the above yarning process. By definition a consensus is not possible unless everyone's views have been aired. The discussion needs to continue until everyone is in agreement. This means listening hard to objections, and trying hard to understand what is behind them, because nothing can proceed if one person is still opposed.

This could sound like nothing will get decided. Consensus is maybe slower in the short term, but slowness is preferable to the imposition of the majority on a minority. Consensus generally works much more easily than people expect. In the 12 years of Balaangala, 10 years of YSCG and 8 years of The Gap LOCO we have always come to a decision without a vote. If things are contentious we keep talking or postpone to do more research or thinking for the next meeting. There is always plenty to do around the things we agree on, action on contentious areas can wait. Consensus in such contentious areas can be achieved by allowing a trial, compromise or synthesis.

A trial - Consensus does not mean everyone has to agree. Sometimes when everyone has been properly heard and understood, the people in the minority will be more willing to allow what most of the others are wanting to do. They know if things don't work out as expected, people can return to their ideas. Having explained why they think a particular course of action will be bad, they may be willing to let the action happen as an experiment. An experiment's progress can be carefully checked to see if their fears are realized. It could also be that the bulk of the group is opposed to something but similarly are willing to let the small



group experiment and learn from the action. Consensus can still allow variety and different ideas to develop, it does not mean everyone has to agree. Permission or acceptance from everyone is required, but if there is a focus on learning, people will allow trials of alternate ideas. Everyone can learn from the experiment.

**Compromise** - Consensus is often achieved by compromise. Each of the opposing sides will give a bit of ground and meet closer to a middle position. This involves a process of negotiation where each side can hang on to the core of what they value but modify the more peripheral components. This involves postponing action till a common ground can be achieved. While this takes time it ensures everyone will be somewhat happy. When consensus is not followed as in western democracies it can lead to unresolved tensions and divisions that can last generations. Consensus over time builds stability and harmony whereas majority rules fuels rivalry and bitterness. When we consider this impact on our culture over generations we can see the importance of encouraging consensus in every small meeting that we are part of. Consensus should really be at the heart of democracy. 'Majority rules' can be seen as a nonphysical form of warfare, where words are used to battle for superiority.

**Synthesis** - Ideally however though the careful listening and thinking about alternate views in a consensus discussion, a new synthesis can be found of opposing positions. A synthesis makes it possible for everyone to fully commit to the new outcome or way forward (without compromise). Everyone in this case participates in a new creative solution. People let go of their previous ideas to embrace a better idea. When this happens you can sense a new level of commitment, energy and solidarity to the group. There is no guarantee a synthesis can be achieved by the consensus process, but the immersion of everyone in the complexity of the whole problem and the alternate views sets up the perfect conditions for the group's creativity and invention. If everyone understands each other's world view a synthesis (and consensus) is possible, and with this synthesis a more probable effective long term solution.<sup>3</sup>

In summary a yarn moves back and forth around circle, with positions being elaborated without long statements at the beginning. Each cycle around the circle presents an opportunity to further elaborate your position, but also to adapt and change your position in light of the ideas of others. During the process each participant gets the chance to further develop their own ideas and to speak longer, but also to arrive at a group position. The group consensus could take the form

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<sup>3</sup> While not in 100% agreement the Uluru statement is an incredible example of consensus between people from different Nations across the country.



of an agreed experiment, a compromise or a synthesis. I am talking about meetings but I am sure you can imagine how the exact same yarning processes described above are relevant in a one to one conversation. The process could be used for community action, business, therapy, and learning, or could be purely a social exercise.

A yarn is not an easy process for a group who are initially strangers, but over time this circular process will become quicker as people begin to understand each other more. Each yarn enables a deeper more detailed and expansive discussion. A yarn will be more fruitful if all the participants are prepared to share their ideas in an open way, and be willing to balance their intent to influence others with a commitment to learn from others. The process will be much easier if all involved try to facilitate the yarn to encourage a deeper listening. Linear and strategic questions, statements and reflections are good but they need to be balanced by circular and reflexive ones.

### Yarning at Balaangala

The early part of the above yarning process has been very evident in a Balaangala Book club where people are committed to learning from each other. It is easier here where there are no decisions to be made about future actions for people to share without judgement. In the Balaangala monthly meetings and in various working groups, action and decisions are required. This requires more of the full yarning process. I think we are slowly embracing this yarning style, but not all members are as consciously aware of its elements, and many still rely on their previous experience of a European meeting structure and processes. People from time to time need to be reminded we explicitly embraced consensus decision making in our governance document when we became incorporated.

Monthly meetings regularly involve including new group members not familiar with our attempts to adopt a culturally consistent decision making approach. Hopefully through the example of more experienced group members a different style can be experientially learnt, while also from time to time making this model explicit. We have always begun with an acknowledgment of country. We are now more aware to try to share where we are all from when a new person joins the group and to find out what 'country' they are from. Taking time to do this will also help to highlight the focus on relationships rather than just getting tasks done.

Time constraints and urgent decisions sometimes constrain our ideal processes. Fortunately we like to pass on some autonomy to small working groups to do



things. In these smaller work groups that have a more stable membership, the yarning process can be more easily implemented. The Timeline project was a good example where members had very different ideas. Having to put things in to words for public display crystalized the different perspectives. The Time line highlights the short history of Europeans in Australia compared to the 60,000 plus years of traditional ownership. While as a group we were not always good at embracing different ideas, we maintained a commitment to ongoing discussion and drafts to get something we could all agree with. From this agreement we then consulted First Nation supporters of the group and finally local Yuggera custodians. While a very small project, the layers of consultation involved around the yarn helped to highlight the complexity of the process and the need for an ongoing discussion. It helps to not assume a final ‘truth’ which is set in stone, even though outside forces like Brisbane City Council demand this. As a result of the timeline I think members are much more knowledgeable about the history of colonization and more committed to action. This highlights that in yarning a lot of the value is in the learning during the process rather than necessarily in the final outcome.

Yarning in the Balaangala context is a relatively easy thing to achieve as we have many likeminded people and people who join with an openness and keenness to learn. It provides a communication ‘lifeboat’, a place to experiment and prepare for a time when others start wanting to move away from the hierarchical communication patterns that dominate our society. I now want to look at how to yarn with someone who wants to control you and the conversation to explore at the micro level what is involved in structural change.

### Talking with the colonizer

Yarning is not so easy when the other has no interest in learning from you and particularly in situations where they want to control you or even eliminate you. Yarning was the key decision making practice in Australia, developed over 60,000 years but was almost totally ignored by the Colonizers. How do we yarn with colonizing types? I want to think about this by considering two types of people. The reasonable controller and the unreasonable dictator. These are not meant to categorize everyone, but rather to just provide two very different examples from a myriad of possibilities so as to begin the discussion.

I am very tentative about the discussion that follows. It is easier to be more committed to certain views when you have some success in particular ways of



talking. In the following examples I have some experiences to reflect on but not much sense of success. This issue will certainly be one I hope to explore much more in the future. I will be keen to hear your ideas.

### **The reasonable controller**

These people believe they are right and that the truth of their position gives them the right to control those who do not know or understand the truth. They assume they are superior. This assumed truth could be based on religious, philosophical or scientific understandings. A key part of their identity however is that they see themselves as reasonable, and so that facts and reasoned argument can change their thinking.

While claiming reasonableness their assumed superiority means they are only likely to learn from those they see as an equal or superior. They may be interested to learn ‘about’ an assumed inferior group of people but not to learn ‘from’ them. Some early colonizers in Australia were like this. Missionaries for example wanted to care for the ‘natives’ but also to convert them. You will have friends and work associates who perhaps have this colonizing character.

Sharing ideas from the inferior position will have little impact, they will not be heard. A more effective starting point for less powerful people is to ask questions and explore the beliefs and theories of the powerful. Reflecting to try to build up a picture of their whole world view. It will be easy for this person to accept their role as teacher and so a relationship can be developed, albeit an unequal one. They will perhaps be excited someone is really listening to their ideas. As in the non-directive form of counselling, just getting this person to put all their ideas together can lead them to recognize their own inconsistencies and gaps in their ideas, encouraging them to rethink aspects. In this way the student is really leading the teacher (despite the perceived power structure).

If a relationship can be built and some trust established, naive sounding questions can be used to highlight inconsistencies and further encouraging their thinking. If done respectfully the teacher may start to recognize the intelligence of the student and start see them as an exception and adopting a more equal status from which a proper yarn could perhaps begin. If done in a cheeky disrespectful way the teacher may close off to the student (to maintain their assumed superiority). Respect is required to make it work. Having a world view that values everyone and everything and their connections helps to generate this respect.

If a trusting relationship can be built then the teacher may start to ask their own questions about the student (learning from the student’s style of asking questions)



and perhaps to find new things that challenge their world view including the assumed superiority. This is a soft way of challenging, but requires an enormous amount of skill and persistence and patience from the subjugated person. Many first nation's people and to some extent the community as a whole have been using this approach for the last 250 years. This reflects the amazing patience of First Nations people, while the colonizer ignored their culture and wisdom. They continued to learn European culture so they could survive and communicate with the colonizers while holding on to their own culture. "Learning two ways".

There are certainly no guarantees but this approach can lead to people becoming allies. In various community actions I have undertaken you try to create allies in the bureaucracy and political system hoping they will support or tolerate (without stopping) the things you are trying to do. While they have power over various things, the hope is if they better understand your 'good' intentions and they may try to assist. We were very fortunate in the early days of Balaangala to have had strong support from the local Council politician despite political differences. Given the above maybe we should do more to try to understand the current unhelpful BCC representative's formal roles, and their own personal agendas in that role.

### *The unreasonable dictator*

The sort of person I am imagining here is a self-interested person who will do and say anything to get their way and to dominate those around them. We have examples of such people in extremely powerful positions such as Putin and Trump, but these sort of people can also exist in a local community organization, (the initial Men's Shed leaders locally being one example). They will be prepared to engage in lies to maintain and build power. In extreme cases to use violence to eliminate opposition. The massacres that took place in colonization in this country is an example.

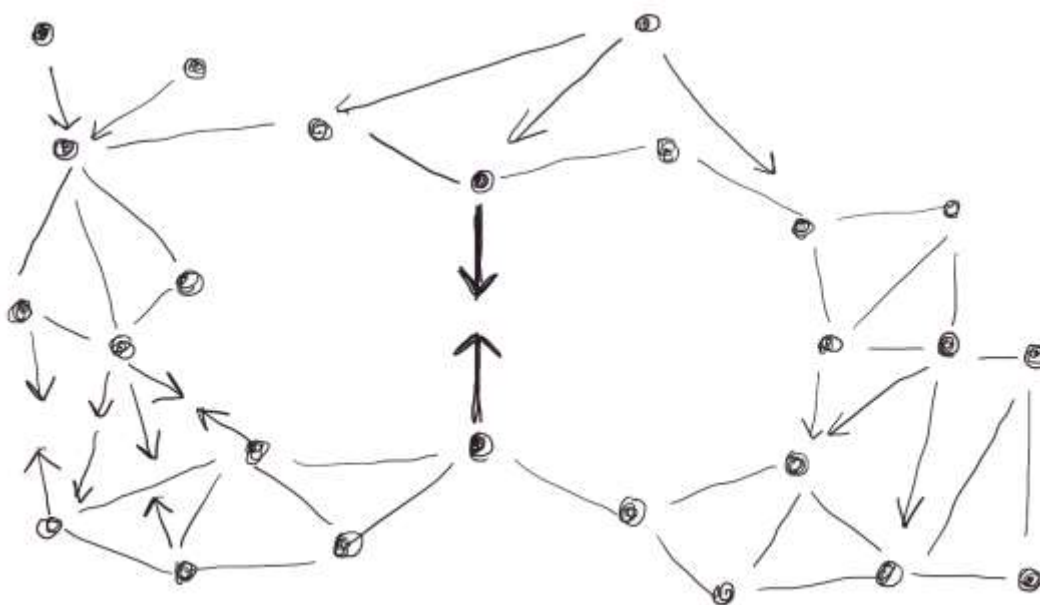
How do you talk to someone who sees killing you as a perhaps necessary option? I have not been in this situation and find it very difficult to imagine how to respond. The Men's Shed did not want to kill us but they certainly wanted to eliminate LOCO and set out to do so. An obvious response and repeated throughout history is to resist and fight back, trying to match the violence of the oppressor. The oppressed have had some victories over the centuries, but those in power generally have come out on top as a result of their greater resources and often greater experience and training in violence. I don't want to denigrate violent responses, even though success may be not likely, because what other choices do an oppressed group of people have, when threatened with overwhelming



force. Self-defence I think does legitimate a violent response and First Nation's warriors should be honoured for their attempts to protect their people and land in the same way as we honour other war veterans. I do however favour nonviolent responses in preference for several reasons.

Ghandi always hoped to change the heart of the oppressor and to befriend the enemy. The British however saw themselves as a rational people and so he found a way to be heard. This hope to change hearts relies on the oppressor having one, but if we accept that some people are sociopaths without empathy, it is unlikely talking will make any difference. They can be impervious to argument and emotion. They just want total control. I am not sure a friendship can be created that won't ultimately be used as a tool by the sociopath against the challenger. In isolation violence or some form of force is perhaps the only realistic response for such people.

However when a sociopathic like person holds a senior position in business or government, their continuance in the role is dependent on many people above and below them in that system. Thinking in this way throws a new light on to the violence vs nonviolence question. Action is not so much about changing the sociopath as influencing those indirectly connected to the conflict via the network of relationships. Here nonviolent actions can be useful to effect perhaps undecided people on one side and maybe to encourage people who have taken a side to shift.



Using one personal example I have at times been completely frustrated and angry at the unreasonable blocking of many thing Balaangala has wanted to do by a





BCC bureaucrat. In network terms there is a direct conflict between Balaangala (me in particular) and a Bureaucrat. Watching on however is a range of onlookers all indirectly connected to both parties, including other bureaucrats that we deal with, the local politician and supporters of Balaangala who are voters and who have connection to BCC in other ways.

I have considered complaining directly to the Lord Major about this bureaucrat trying to get them to be forced to change their opposition to us. This would form a personal attack and could be seen as a violent response in that there is the potential it could contribute to them getting demoted or shifted. It could well backfire with even more control imposed by the bureaucrat. Success with this approach would seem very unlikely unless we knew of many other organizations having the same problem. If such groups joined together success would be more likely. Regardless, however a consequence of this would be to alienate many potential supporters from within the bureaucracy. Even if his fellow Bureaucrats did not like him, and would be happy to see him go somewhere else, going over someone's head to complain would create the fear that we may do the same in relation to their actions and so undermining the trust in their relationship with us. A better less violent response may be to directly challenge this Bureaucrat in person. However if they are 'completely unreasonable' this may lead to a similar result where this person denigrates Balaangala within the bureaucracy. I have some suspicion this has already been happening.

Thinking more structurally about conflict, a nonviolent response is less likely to alienate people who are indirectly connected to the conflict. Given more rational, empathic people in these connected positions there is more hope of argument changing their minds and to build more support for the oppressed group, encouraging them to indirectly challenge the oppressor themselves. This is what First nations people have been doing over the last 200 years campaigning and building allies amongst the settlers for their legitimate claims for a Voice, Treaty and Truth Telling. These allies in political parties, government, churches, bureaucracy and the wider community have helped to build wider support. First Nations people have been very successful in building such support in the broader community to help ward off and reduce the ambitions of the most enthusiastic colonizers.

At some point the bureaucracy may make a detrimental decision where Balaangala will have to take some explicit nonviolent form of action. The hope in such action would be to build community support and pressure. A violent



styled protest can alienate this community support, whereas nonviolent protest can help build the empathy and commitment of onlookers to the conflict.

I think part of my problem in thinking about Balaangala and BCC is that I have personalized the problem, seeing the local politician and a bureaucrat as being the problem. It would be much more nonviolent to see the problem as a reflection of the whole system, of the hierarchy that allows these decisions to be made. I really have no idea of what internal pressures and conversations are going on. If I wanted to write a letter of complaint, maybe it should be addressed to the whole of the BCC bureaucracy, and challenging their top down decision making and encouraging them to develop a flatter consensus based system that listens and learns from the community. (I can hear the pig's wings flapping outside my window.) This imagining does lead me to reconsider my orientation to workers in BCC. I need to listen and learn about their constraints and limitations within the bureaucracy, and to empathise with their own powerlessness within the system to do things differently.

Regardless of what ever creative nonviolent solution is tried, there is no guarantee it will be effective. It is not a Hollywood movie where the moral nonviolent stance will eventually win out. The history of the world is that violence has been a powerful force and the most violent often win in conflicts. There are proud histories of resistance of both violent and nonviolent struggle. All we can do is to try to maximise our chances of success, and to try to develop responses and actions that leave us with integrity for the next battle. At the same time 60,000 years of a relatively peaceful stable society gives me inspiration that we can recreate a more nonviolent society where sharing is the norm rather than greed.

So in summary I am suggesting with the reasonable controller, beginning with and accepting the controller's way of framing the relationship can create a base to turn that around and create a more mutual relationship. Talk here will involve circular and reflexive questions to try to better understand their world view, before looking for inconsistencies and gaps.

In relation to the unreasonable dictator I am not sure any direct conversation will have any impact. The task has to be more about finding support in the onlookers hoping they can use their own connections to change things. All the yarning process described above are relevant to building this support and finding allies. Ultimately when really threatened by an unreasonable dictator a more forceful nonviolent solution will be required, perhaps even eventually requiring violent resistance.



### Talk, yarning and my history

I want now to look back at my life to see if I can add some other ideas from my own life story about how we could talk better to kindred spirits and those strongly opposed to our ideas. In doing so (as I wind to the end of this manuscript) I am wanting to remind the reader of earlier discussions.

I think my shyness as a child has a virtue when dealing with controlling people. I think it is good to be shy of them and to reduce their power by not working for them. At the same time I want to be less shy, more open and reflexive in listening to and building relationships with strangers. Everyone has a story that could be learnt from. It is through these connections and relationships that change will happen.

It is to be expected that people will talk to each other in ways given by our culture. The State has an investment in ensuring its subjects will be willing to work hard and to even die for the state in times of war. It was also clear in my primary school years that not everyone conforms to their socialization and that rebellion is possible. High school made this even clearer. Change to the status quo was



possible. I began to identify even more with the underdog at High School while still actually avoiding talking to new people including underdogs.

My social work education taught me how to listen better in real practical ways and gave me more confidence in talking to different people. I can now see that my talking style after graduating was very strategic, trying to persuade people to support my analysis of society and nonviolence as a method. While espousing an egalitarian, collaborative, nonviolent approach I think in practice I was often very controlling (perhaps in subtle ways) to pursue my goals.

Getting married to Michelle and moving to Ropeley, I think I was becoming less ideologically rigid in my everyday communication and more interested in finding out about and learning from local people. I think my talk became more ‘circular’. At Uni I was teaching communication skills which was very informative for me. I could see how I needed to examine my own ‘style of talk’. I began to realize how the counselling techniques and approaches were very relevant to community work and to achieving a proper dialogue. I could see how ‘talk’ needed to match rhetoric. I became aware of my own and other peoples’ inconsistencies.

Working in Family services I learnt how to fulfil expectations from superiors while trying to still hold on to my own style and approach. I began to find more ways to develop mutual relationships in an unlikely contexts. I found ways to hang on to my own identity within a hostile context.

After a few years teaching at Uni I became very aware of how different our espoused ideals can be from our actual practice, from our actual way of talking to others. Despite the idealism of Social Work, controlling strategic self-interested talk was very evident in my work place and I began to realize how we were modelling this incongruity. Students were learning ‘what to say’ and ‘how to say it’ to pass exams, and then similarly adapting after graduating to fit in to the style of talk required by their employer. While teaching students to be change agents we were actually teaching them how to fit in. We were espousing one thing but ‘examining and assessing’ students in a contradictory way. The consequence of this was a self-deception about our influence on the student’s future practice. I was also becoming confused by the contradiction between my own personal ideals and my repressed ambition as an academic. My lack of congruence lead to depression, anxiety and withdrawal. I lost confidence in my communicative abilities and ideals.

I had always opposed inequality and hierarchy but my work at uni gave me first-hand experience of the emotional damage that ambition and the externalization



of the systems anxiety and depression can do. My ‘talk’ at Uni in the assessment and evaluation of students made me part of that externalization process. Not wanting to ‘talk’ this way and feeling unable to change the system. I felt defeated and a failure. I left and was in limbo for what seemed a long agonizing time.

Building POD farm I became more grounded and the support of family helped me to regain my confidence and sense of purpose. I felt my words and actions were now more congruent and I regained a belief my ‘talk’ was ‘good’ again. Through painting I found another way to communicate, one where I could “talk” in more reflexive ways.

The community garden, LOCO and Balaangala all helped me experiment with consensus and ways of talking that are non-hierarchical. I became more aware of the stable flat governance system that exist here for thousands of years and something of the process of yarning which helped to create and sustain this style of governance.

I want to keep developing my yarning ability with likeminded people but also with those opposed to a flatter, egalitarian environmentally enhancing society. I think I am finding a style of ‘talking’ which is more consistent with the sort of society I am wanting to create.

Writing all of these thoughts down has strengthened my beliefs that, the means are the ends, there is always a recursion between the micro and the macro and so to ‘be the change’. Macro change is required and this book has focused on what I could do but at the same time it is clear micro change is also required, particularly with my own style of communication. I think much learning for both the micro and macro can be found by shifting our focus between both extremes and positive ripples can emerge from change at either end. Achieving some ‘good’ changes in interpersonal relationships can open up new ways to tackle structural change and visa versa.



## Conclusion

I want a non-hierarchical, egalitarian, environmentally enhancing mutual community based society.



My inspiration comes from the amazing success of our First Nations peoples across the Country which maintained a sustainable, egalitarian, consensus based sharing society for thousands of years where different language groups respected each other land.





I want to challenge and resist the shift to an increasingly unequal, hierarchical, environmentally damaging, selfish, individualistic society. To do this involves supporting a range of strategies including in particular the neglected approach of developing lifeboats, small experiments trying to model a more ideal society as well as beginning the building of a new infrastructure for when the existing system starts to unravel



As part of these broader strategies for change I also need to look inward to build some communication ‘lifeboats’ to experiment with better ways of talking to others that are consistent with these espoused ideals. I have found inspiration in the yarning process developed by First Nations people. Yarning involves sharing the airways, deep listening, sharing ideas, consensus, creativity, and doing all of this while remembering you are standing on ‘country’. We are all totally dependent on the environment around us. We are not in control of each other or the environment, mutuality is the goal. We need to care for each other and our environment. A simple but difficult goal.