

Paper

Comparing two dialogue methods for appreciating differences and similarities in groups and in honours education

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Received: June 21, 2026; Accepted: September 21, 2026; Published: September 22, 2026

Abstract

In increasingly diverse and polarized societies, honours education faces the challenge of preparing students to engage constructively with differences in perspectives, identities, experiences, values and emotions. Dialogue is recognized as a powerful practice for fostering mutual understanding and empathy, perspective taking, and collaboration in diverse learning environments. This article compares two structured dialogue methods that support such learning: the Toolbox dialogue method and the Keti Koti Table dialogue method. Drawing on scholarship in education, collaboration and communication, we analyse cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of dialogue. Toolbox dialogue was developed to help participants identify and reflect on differences and similarities in underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions, particularly in interdisciplinary education and research. Keti Koti Table dialogue was designed to foster mutual understanding and empathy through the sharing of personal narratives and emotions concerning sensitive societal issues, like the legacies of colonialism and slavery. While they differ in structure, scale, and emphasis, both methods contribute to students' intellectual, (inter)personal, and reflective development by creating structured opportunities for deep listening, perspective taking, and collaborative meaning-making. Their complementary strengths make them valuable pedagogical tools for honours education, particularly in contexts characterized by diversity, complexity, and societal polarization.

Keywords: dialogue, perspective taking, empathy, collaboration, community building, joint reflection

1. The growing relevance of dialogue to education

In western society and academia alike, dialogue has been an integral ingredient at least since Socrates navigated the Athenian agora and inspired Plato's teaching and writings, or "that period in the history of philosophy ... when dialectic, the art of dealing with things in conversation, could appear to be almost identical with true philosophy and science" (Kapp, 1942, p. 18). Dialogue received new impetus in (early) modernity when it allowed authors like Giordani Bruno, Galileo Galilei and Thomas Hobbes to voice new and contentious ideas or hide 'dissonant voices' that could elicit censorship or worse (Clucas, 2008).

More recently, dialogue has gained new societal relevance as a form of communication apt for engaging with diversity and pluralism. Critically different from monologic discourse, dialogue has become an influential inclusive practice in many societal domains, handling social and interreligious division, supporting democratic deliberation, fostering restorative justice, and more (Dessel, 2011). In research, too, dialogue is increasingly used for integrating different insights (McDonald et al., 2009). Education has also been considered as a 'dialogical space' between student and world, or as an encounter between self and world that does justice to both (Biesta, 1998). Dialogue fosters the 'circular model of education' according to which students and professors, but also academia and society interact more closely (Keestra & Keestra, 2015). Supported by a socio-cultural theory of teaching and learning, "dialogic education" has become prominent in recent decades across all levels of education (Mercer et al., 2019). Authors have elaborated the use of dialogue in specific forms of dialogic teaching, instruction, and inquiry (Kuhn, 2015; Skidmore, 2006). Crucially, although there are many dialogue methods, dialogue in education is grounded in principles like equality – between students and between students and teachers – collectivity, reciprocity, and accountability (Cui & Teo, 2021).

In this article we offer a conceptual comparison of two dialogue methods that are relevant to navigating differences in positionality, perspective, belief, and value, and that have educational applications beyond the classroom. We are both philosophers with special interests in communication language, dialogue, hermeneutics and interdisciplinary collaboration, and we have separately developed two dialogue methods over the past 20 years, the Toolbox dialogue method and the Ketu Koti Table dialogue method. Through our exchanges and collaborations over that time, we have come to appreciate differences between these methods while acknowledging their similarities as dialogical practices. We also recently had the opportunity to present our methods to an honours education conference,¹ which led us to recognize the value of both methods for honours education.

Our goal here is to describe how these modes of inclusive communication practice can be used to create connections across similarities and differences, increasing communicative and collaborative capacity in social groups at many levels. After a brief exposition of dialogue in general, we articulate the cognitive and affective aspects of dialogue. These stand out in theoretical treatments of dialogue as central dimensions along which characteristic features of dialogue emerge (e.g., O'Rourke et al., 2020). We then present the two methods and

¹ This was the "Honours-conference 2025: Students facilitate the future", held on 31 October and 1 November 2025 and hosted by the Center for Interdisciplinary Education at the University of Oslo.

close by comparing them along eleven dimensions and discussing their relevance for honours education.

2. On dialogue in general

Keti Koti Table dialogue and Toolbox dialogue are different types of structured dialogue designed to create connection across diversity. Although they differ, we focus in this introductory section on an important way in which they are similar, viz., in being types of *dialogue*. We begin by contrasting dialogue with monologue – the latter consists of one person speaking without interaction with others, while the former requires participation of at least two speakers. Multiple contributions from multiple speakers are necessary for dialogue, but they are not sufficient since they do not rule out the possibility of “chunks of monologue stuck together” (Pickering & Garrod, 2004, p. 170). An additional condition is needed to *connect* the contributions, either in terms of meaning (e.g., a subsequent speaking turn elaborates a previous one) or in terms of the type of speaking move (e.g., question and answer). This yields a minimal definition of ‘dialogue’ as “coherent interaction across multiple contributions from multiple participants” (Traum, 2022), where coherence consists in connection among contributions.

Keti Koti Table dialogue and Toolbox dialogue require more than these minimal structural details, though. In both cases it is important that the dialogue address certain themes – i.e., that it be about certain things – and that participants engage in such a way that it results in mutual understanding and empathy. Dialogue is structured in both cases to ensure that it satisfy these additional conditions (O’Rourke & McLeskey, 2024). We consider each of these conditions in turn, focusing first on what we will classify as *cognitive* aspects of dialogue before turning to *affective* aspects.

3. Cognitive aspects of dialogue

Since all instances of dialogue involve some focal topic(s), we endorse a conception of dialogue that incorporates content as a specific and important mode of connection among contributions. Specifically, we take dialogue to involve collaborative meaning-making. So understood, dialogue is the joint development of interpretations, with contributors attending to each other’s perspective while reflecting upon differences and similarities (Kuhn, 2015).

Dialogue can help fathom the space of available interpretations concerning a shared topic. This content-focused condition on dialogue is reflected in speaking turns, but beneath these the speakers are engaged in more “subterranean” activities grounding their contributions and focusing them on their joint goal, like solving a problem or mutual understanding and empathy (O’Rourke et al., 2020, p. 97). We take these to include cognitive activities such as closely monitoring themselves and others (i.e., ‘deep listening’ (Sprain & Black, 2018)), updating what is jointly believed (i.e., the ‘common ground’ (Clark & Brennan, 1991)) as well as what isn’t, and formulating speaking turns that contribute, at least when taken together, in a constructive, ‘yes and’ fashion to the emerging space of available experiences and interpretations (Strober, 2011).

In both Ketu Koti Table and Toolbox dialogue, it is important for participants to engage in these activities – deep listening is built into Ketu Koti Table dialogue, and Toolbox dialogues are facilitated to ensure active updating of similarities and differences among core beliefs and values. Further, in both cases, dialogue is structured to focus participants on specific themes they collectively consider, for example, differences in the impact of historical trauma in the case of Ketu Koti Table dialogue (Keestra et al., 2025) and differences in expertise in the case of Toolbox dialogue (Hubbs et al. 2020).

4. Affective and relational aspects of dialogue

Education's goals in the 21st century have expanded beyond 'qualification' in terms of knowledge and skills and 'socialization' into a particular culture to include 'subjectification' of individuals as autonomous, responsible subjects of their own actions (Biesta & Stengel, 2016). Subjectification requires not only cognitive but also emotional regulation and growth. Emotion entails motivation, helping us "sort out the relationship between ourselves and the world" (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 118) associated with a change in 'action readiness' (Frijda, 2004).

Dialogue can contribute to these processes, if shaped adequately. 'Adversarial dialogue', common in education, aims at competitively undermining and criticizing ideas. 'Exploratory Dialogue', in contrast, encourages critical thinking, sharing of perspectives, and mutual understanding while constructing meaning collaboratively. Exploratory dialogue includes not only cognitive but also social and emotional dimensions (Kilby, 2021). Indeed, the practice of 'affective learning together' requires rebalancing pedagogies between cognitive, social, and emotional or affective learning while emphasizing the importance of the affective (Baker et al., 2013).

While dialogue typically fosters mutual understanding of multiple perspectives, its affective consequences are equally important, although they might differ across dialogue methods. Whereas Toolbox dialogue foregrounds the cognitive dimensions of crossdisciplinary – i.e. inter-, multi- or transdisciplinary – collaboration, it also recognizes the "affective characteristics that bring people into closer association when they engage dialogically" (O'Rourke et al., 2020, p. 102). Since Ketu Koti Table dialogue was originally developed to foster mutual understanding and empathy across differences in a shared history of colonialism, slavery, and their legacies, emotions are explicitly addressed as an important dimension of individual experiences and insights. Moreover, Ketu Koti Table dialogue not only aims to increase cognitive awareness but also to enhance the motivation and readiness to fight racism and discrimination, for example (cf. Felten & Taouanza, 2018; Keestra, 2020).

To ensure that these affective aspects of dialogue can emerge, facilitators in both dialogue methods work to create a brave space for participants to openly share personal and sometimes vulnerable experiences and insights (Arao & Clemens, 2023).

5. The Toolbox Dialogue Method

Consider the following exchange between Pat, an ecologist, and Robin, a hydrologist/geologist, two collaborators on a crossdisciplinary research team that has gathered for a facilitated Toolbox dialogue workshop:

Pat: Well, for me, science just is hypothesis testing – anything else and you’re just making stuff up!

Robin: You take me to be a scientist, right?

Pat: Of course!

Robin: Well, I don’t use hypotheses in my work. Research questions, sure, but the rhetoric of hypothesis formation and testing doesn’t factor into it.

Pat: <jaw drops> (cf. (Donovan et al., 2015))

This is an important moment of clarification and opportunity for these colleagues: Robin’s revelation may incline Pat to expand their conception of science and the possibilities for their collaboration. Differences in core belief and value like this one are not uncommon in crossdisciplinary research, and the emergent insights that mark crossdisciplinary success depend on recognizing and leveraging them. Developed to facilitate this recognition, the Toolbox dialogue method uses dialogue structured by philosophical concepts and methods to help dialogue participants share and compare their core commitments as researchers. By encouraging reflection and perspective taking, the method supports participants in teaching their own perspective and in learning about other perspectives represented in the group. This is especially valuable for research teams, but it can also be valuable for groups of individuals interested in developing their capacity to communicate and collaborate across professional differences.

The Toolbox dialogue method is designed to facilitate efficient and even surgical disclosure of similarities and differences across the different perspectives represented by dialogue participants. The method uses a survey-like instrument containing dialogue prompts that express core beliefs and values which may differ across the dialogue group. The prompts are written to promote exploration of their similarities and differences as researchers. For example, the exchange above was structured by the prompt, “Scientific research must be hypothesis driven.” Other prompts include “Scientists have a moral obligation to improve society through research” and “Value-neutral scientific research is possible.” Typically, the method involves compiling prompts into thematically unified modules (see Fig. 1) with a ‘Toolbox’ instrument comprising one to six modules. Each prompt is associated with a rating response scale (1-5, disagree to agree, with ‘I don’t know’ and ‘Not applicable’ options) that encourages stance taking and comparison across participants. Although the Toolbox instrument looks like a survey, the prompts are not psychometrically validated survey items; rather, they are written to promote reaction and interaction. Each of these instruments is written with a particular group in mind, aiming to meet them where they are and structure a dialogue that will be meaningful to them. The dialogue begins after the participants score each prompt and focuses on the topics articulated by the prompts. After the dialogue concludes, it is followed by a co-creation activity designed to create something (e.g., a concept map, project glossary) that leverages what is learned in dialogue.

Interdisciplinarity – What characteristics differentiate interdisciplinarity from disciplinarity?

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|-------|--------------|-----|
| 1. Differences in conceptual frameworks impede useful integration in interdisciplinary research. | Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Agree | I don't know | N/A |
| 2. An interdisciplinary project cannot be successful unless project members fully understand all parts of the project. | Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Agree | I don't know | N/A |
| 3. Interdisciplinarity is key to successful teaching and learning on complex real-world problems. | Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Agree | I don't know | N/A |
| 4. It is undesirable that many university students receive only disciplinary education. | Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Agree | I don't know | N/A |
| 5. Interdisciplinarity inevitably yields more superficial knowledge than disciplinarity. | Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Agree | I don't know | N/A |
| 6. Activity (e.g., research, teaching) can be interdisciplinary without being integrative. | Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Agree | I don't know | N/A |
| 7. Interdisciplinary activity that involves the sciences is more difficult than interdisciplinary activity that doesn't involve the sciences. | Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Agree | I don't know | N/A |

Figure 1. A module on interdisciplinarity from the “AIS Interdisciplinary Toolbox instrument”, developed by the authors

The outcome of the structured Toolbox dialogue process is enhanced mutual understanding among the participants about how their core research beliefs and values are similar and different, which can mean substantial gain in function for a crossdisciplinary research team. Reflection and perspective taking are key to meta-cognitive gains made by a team – reflection enables more accurate articulation of the perspectives represented in the dialogue group, and perspective taking behavior helps participants understand similarities and differences among those perspectives (Hubbs et al., 2020; Kestra, 2017). Dialogue structured by prompts that articulate core research beliefs and values can address what we have called the “Problem of Unacknowledged Differences” (Hubbs et al., 2021). Members of heterogeneous groups of experts, such as crossdisciplinary research teams, know they are different, but they don’t necessarily know how. (The same can be said for unacknowledged similarities.) Experts are trained to have deep knowledge in a domain, but that training does not usually include information about how their expertise differs from that of others. However, crossdisciplinary success will typically depend on identifying these differences and leveraging them to produce research output that is more than the sum of its parts. These cognitive aspects receive principal emphasis in the Toolbox dialogue method, but affective considerations are also critical to successful Toolbox dialogues.

As we emphasized above, the affective considerations relevant to dialogue are social and emotional in character. Successful Toolbox dialogue is engaged dialogue, which can be contrasted with the aforementioned “chunks of monologue stuck together” (Pickering & Garrod, 2004, p. 170). Engagement is a social relation that requires attention and commitment on the part of dialogue participants. Participants in engaged Toolbox dialogue will typically exhibit openness to new ideas, the vulnerability associated with perspective change, a commitment to deep listening, a respect for their interlocutors, and a desire to develop mutual understanding around co-created interpretations of issues important to the team (Hubbs et al., 2020; Nagda, 2006; Sprain & Black, 2018). Often these affective characteristics are exhibited because the participants are teammates who lean into the experience, hoping that dialogical engagement will improve their ability to communicate and collaborate with one another. Buy-in to the experience alone is insufficient to ensure a safe environment that encourages and rewards vulnerability and openness; in addition, we introduce dialogue norms in the form of workshop guidelines, such as be kind, be honest, and be present. Furthermore, dialogue sessions and subsequent co-creation activities are facilitated in a light-handed way to keep the focus on issues that matter to the participants while ensuring that they remain engaged with one another.

6. The Ketu Koti Table Dialogue Method

After fifty dialogue pairs with mixed backgrounds engaged for 30 minutes in a round of personal dialogue on their individual experiences, emotions, and insights on ‘Speaking out, or Remaining Silent?’, an elderly black woman in festive Surinamese dress accepted the microphone from the facilitator. Emotionally, she shared with the group:

“Until today, I really hated white people for what they did to our ancestors during slavery and how their racism persists. Yet only now did I share this grudge for the first time, while fearing how my interlocutor would respond to it. To my surprise this young white woman not only listened but even recognized my feelings and said she understood and could acknowledge this hate of mine. I am now over 70 but this conversation means a big relief to me – it feels as if a heavy weight has finally fallen from my shoulders...”

All 99 other participants, the two dialogue facilitators, and the Surinamese choir that contributes to the Ketu Koti Table were moved by her honest account of personal and emotional transformation.

Developed purposively to address the difficult history of colonialism, slavery, and their aftermath, each Ketu Koti Table brings together 100 participants who engage in dialogue with someone they don’t know and who has a different background (Zandwijken & Keestra, 2018). More than 400 Ketu Koti Tables have been co-organized in the Netherlands and abroad with museums, municipalities, higher education institutions, police stations, and more, with some 45.000 participants in total. The 2,5-hour long event starts with a libation ceremony by a small Surinamese choir, followed by a welcome song that was sung by enslaved people on sugar plantations in Suriname until Emancipation Day on July 1, 1863.

Next, participants are invited by a facilitator to perform a specific ritual in silence while the choir sings *A Boro Gron*—a song that tells the story of an enslaved woman crying tears that pass down her cheeks and heart, eventually drilling a hole in the ground. Listening in silence, participants take turns rubbing each other's wrists with coconut oil while chewing on a piece of Surinamese bitterwood. This 'invented ritual' symbolizes tasting the bitterness of the ugly past while rubbing away its lasting pain. Since colonialism and slavery have impacted entire societies through racism, white supremacy, and the 'cultural archive' associated with these, they have tainted not only descendants of enslaved but all other citizens (Said, 1993; Wekker, 2016). Given this shared cultural archive, the *Keti Koti Table*, although developed in the Dutch context, has been adjusted to other post-slavery contexts, for example celebrating Juneteenth in the US (Keestra & Zandwijken, 2020; N'Sumbu, 2023).

The actual dialogue is carried out while participants enjoy a three-course meal together, derived from the traditional menu of the enslaved. Three different dialogue rounds focus on a single overarching theme like: 'Apology making: how do you do it?'; or 'Family secret: how does it affect you?' or 'Belonging in academia: a challenge?' The question for the first dialogue round in each case invites participants to share a rather difficult experience from the past related to the theme – for example when they struggled to make apologies for a transgression they made. The second question asks whether they recently had perhaps a more positive experience, like when their apologies helped restoring a troubled relationship.

Finally, the dialogue pairs use the third round to consider how they can together contribute to a future different from this past with regard to that same theme – how we can facilitate the process of apologizing, for example. Addressing affective aspects, each question comes with an invitation to share the emotion(s) it elicits. Since cognition alone contributes only modestly to behavioral change, which also relies on a person's motivation, these affective and emotional aspects receive equal attention.

Contributing to a brave space in which participants share very personal and sensitive emotions, experiences, and insights, the *Keti Koti Table* is highly structured with facilitators playing an important role (see Table 1). Inspired by non-violent communication methods (Rosenberg, 2015), structure and facilitation ensure that each dialogue partner enjoys the same speaking time, listening (in silence) is as important as speaking, and (silent) reflections focus on the dialogue question and on the narrative of the dialogue partner and its emotional impact upon the listener.

After each dialogue round, facilitators invite participants to share from their dialogue and jointly reflect upon the striking similarities or differences in their narratives: can these be understood as the result of skin colors, migration backgrounds, genders, ages, or something else? With this joint group reflection and explanatory contributions from the facilitators, the *Keti Koti Table* touches upon several levels simultaneously: the micro level of the dialogue partners, the meso level of the group of participants at a specific dialogue table, and the macro level of the shared socio-cultural context (Keestra et al., 2025).

Table 1. *Structure of the first (of three) dialogue round of the Ketu Koti Table, including initial preparation. Taken with permission from (Keestra et al., 2025)*

The Ketu Koti Table Dialogue Structure	
Preparation	1. Forming couples
	2. Theme presentation and dialogue question
	3. Silence—for 1 minute
Dialogue Part I	4. First speaker—for 3 minutes
	5. Silence—for 1 minute
	6. Listener speaks—for 2 minutes
Dialogue Part II	7. Second speaker—for 3 minutes
	8. Silence—for 1 minute
	9. Listener speaks—for 2 minutes
Conclusion round of dialogue	10. Shared reflection—for 5 minutes
	11. Plenary discussion
	12. Goodbye—and possibly change of dialogue couples
Next round of dialogue	Repeat from step 2 with next dialogue question

Key aims of this dialogue method are mutual understanding and empathy, in contrast with debate and discussion about such sensitive topics which tend toward increasing radicalism and polarization (Nagda, 2019; Lord et al., 1979; Sears et al., 1964). The personal narratives shared in this dialogue invite participants to stand inside each other's shoes (Johnson, 2024). This implies both cognitive and affective dimensions as the stories contain specific narrative and emotional content elicited by questions like, "Can you share with your dialogue partner an experience when you struggled with apologizing to somebody? How did that make you feel at the time, and now that you're sharing this?"

Given dialogue partners with different backgrounds, they come to appreciate the 'space of possible experiences, insights and emotions.' In addition, they jointly reflect upon the reasons for similarities and/or differences between their narratives. This contributes to a more comprehensive mutual understanding between them, which combined with similar reflections of others in the plenary lead to a much richer understanding of complex human phenomena like courage, vulnerability, shame, etc. The emotional dimension of shared narratives – affecting both speaker and listener – in turn contributes to the layered personal repertoire of emotions and motivations that plays a role in their actions (Keestra, 2020).

Responding to external requests, Ketu Koti Tables have been adjusted to other contents such as social alienation in gentrifying neighbourhoods or developing a shared agenda for sickle-cell anemia patients and their doctors, and applied to specific contexts such as prison guards and prisoners, or police and urban youth (Keestra et al., 2025). Indeed, Ketu Koti Table participants often express not only more appreciation for differences and similarities but

also confidence in our shared humanity and the ability to increase social justice (Immler & Wentholt, 2023). Unsurprisingly, therefore, an advisory report to the Dutch government highlights the Keti Koti Table as one of few effective methods to mitigate affective polarization (Adviescommissie, 2023).

7. Navigating Differences & Similarities with the Dialogue Methods: A Comparison

The Toolbox and Keti Koti Table dialogue methods both focus on jointly learning from differences and similarities and fostering richer forms of interaction that contribute to collaborative capacity, mutual understanding and, ultimately, community. As humans also develop their identity while sharing narratives with others, there is a close interaction between understanding oneself and others in dialogue (Keestra, 2020). Differences among people can create challenges but also opportunities (Eschen et al., 2025). Differences in knowledge and experience support crossdisciplinary research designed to meet complex problems with complex responses, for example. Social cohesion and justice are likewise supported by mutual understanding and empathy across differences in experience, insight, and emotion.

Currently, we are facing a ‘polycrisis’ of interconnected, complex global problems (Rakowski et al., 2025) that are complicated by a polarizing social and political climate. Such a climate makes collaboration, community building and social justice daunting affairs that require specific forms of communication (Brooks et al., 2025). As educators, we believe it is incumbent on those of us who educate future leaders to encourage empathy and respect for difference and to enhance those abilities that strengthen community by leveraging and integrating differences (cf. (Page, 2007; Woolley et al., 2010)). We also believe that dialogue can function as a central part of curricula designed to help people identify, examine, and appreciate differences by encouraging openness and perspective taking that make one receptive to differences in perspective. In this section we describe how Toolbox and Keti Koti Table help one navigate differences before concluding in the next section by speaking to educational applications of these two dialogue methods.

Table 2 below compares the two dialogue methods and makes explicit differences in pedagogical objectives, contents, participants, modes of engagement, and practical conditions. As we describe above, when discussing the cognitive and affective/relational features of the methods, the distinctions made are relative rather than absolute. Indeed, we consider the dialogue methods to be complementary in several ways. Nonetheless, Table 2 may help the reader, teacher, or project leader determine which method is appropriate for their particular purpose or combine the two.

Table 2. *A detailed comparison of the Toolbox dialogue method with the Keti Koti Table dialogue method along eleven dimensions*

Comparative dimension	Toolbox dialogue method	Keti Koti Table dialogue method
Primary educational purpose	Expose and coordinate unacknowledged differences in	Develop mutual understanding and empathy across positional

	core beliefs, values, and assumptions among collaborators	and biographical differences through personal narrative, emotion, and joint reflection
Types of difference addressed	Often unacknowledged epistemic, ontological, social, professional, and organizational differences within a collaborating group	Differences and similarities in lived experience, identity, positionality, biography, and emotional response within a shared socio-cultural context
Cognitive and affective/relational emphasis	Cognitive and metacognitive reflection is foregrounded; relational trust, openness, and vulnerability enable participants to collectively consider their perspectives	Affective and relational engagement is foregrounded; cognitive perspective taking and interpretation develop through listening to narratives and emotions, enhancing the understanding of complexity
Group size and unit of interaction	A collaborative group in whole-group dialogue; no fixed size is inherent, but fewer than 15 is preferred; each participant must be able to contribute meaningfully	Small, as in honours education, to large-group event; described here with 100 participants, organized as 50 dialogue pairs and followed by plenary reflection
Degree and form of structure	Moderately structured: participants individually score tailored prompts in one to six thematic modules and subsequently discuss their responses, often followed by a related co-creation activity	Three structured personal dialogue rounds with timed turns for speaking and silent reflection and facilitated plenary reflections. Optional is an additional scripted sequence of ritual opening, musical intermissions, meal.
Role of facilitation	Light-handed facilitation maintains engagement, supports comparison of commitments, and keeps attention on issues that matter to the group	Active facilitation explains and safeguards the process, enforces equal turns and listening, frames questions, supports joint learning during plenary reflections
Required conditions and brave space	Workshop norms (be kind, be honest, be present); buy-in from participants; willingness to disclose and critically evaluate assumptions; sufficient trust for professional vulnerability	Careful preparation and facilitation; culturally grounded framing; equality between diverse dialogue partners; willingness to share and receive sensitive narratives; support for

		emotional vulnerability and cultural sensitivities
Intended learning outcomes	Enhanced mutual understanding of previously unacknowledged disciplinary and normative differences; improved communicative and collaborative capacity in heterogeneous expert teams	Transformation of perspective; increased understanding and empathy across differences; increased awareness of role of emotions in experience and action; readiness to act against discrimination and injustice; enriched narrative identity
Suitable educational contexts	Crossdisciplinary and cross-professional courses, research teams, honours projects, and other settings where participants collaborate across expertise or working assumptions and aim to produce a whole greater than the sum of its parts	Honours and other education, conferences, and civic or professional settings addressing sensitive histories, polarization, belonging, discrimination, or unequal social positions at meso and macro levels while approaching these from a personal (micro) level
Preparation and resource demands	Typically requires a group-specific instrument with suitable prompts, light facilitation, time for dialogue, and, where used, preparation of a co-creation activity that leverages what is learned in dialogue	Requires prepared facilitation capacity and paired seating, preparation of suitable dialogue theme and questions, time for dialogue. Optional are the inclusion of a meal, musical and ritual components in the full format
Possible limitations or risks	Prompts may oversimplify complex commitments; prompt language (e.g., intentional ambiguity or vagueness) may distract from deeper issues; dominant voices can narrow the exchange; the method may be less suitable when emotional injury or identity-based experience is the primary object of learning	Personal disclosure can create emotional exposure or pressure to represent a group; power differences may inhibit reciprocity; sensitive issues may evoke emotions – requiring sensitive facilitation. If included, ritual and cultural elements require careful adjustment to socio-cultural contexts, so preparation involving local participation is relevant.

8. Relevance of these dialogue methods for honours education

We submit that education is valuable to the extent that it exposes you to and helps you navigate the pluralism apparent and hidden in our midst, e.g., differences and similarities

between what you know and what you don't know, between what you're aware of and what you're unaware of, between what you've experienced and what you haven't experienced. Dialogue is an effective vehicle for identifying, comparing, and considering differences and similarities, which explains its widespread utility in educational contexts (Kuhn, 2015). Differing from each other in preparation, group size, dialogue structure, role of facilitation, contents and more, Toolbox and Ketikoti Table dialogue methods support participants differently in identifying, sharing, and coordinating similarities and differences, strengthening the social fabric in the process.

In different ways, the Toolbox and Ketikoti Table dialogue methods have been developed and employed in educational contexts. The Toolbox was designed in the context of graduate education to help Ph.D. students integrate across disciplinary differences (Bosque-Pérez et al., 2016; Hubbs et al., 2020), and it has been used for twenty years in various educational contexts, including undergraduate courses and research programs (O'Rourke et al., 2024). Most of these applications have occurred in crossdisciplinary contexts, where cognitive differences are especially pronounced. The Ketikoti Table was developed to help large, diverse groups learn about the variety of individual experiences, insights, and emotions regarding sensitive topics that are influenced by shared, complex, socio-cultural contexts like the history of colonialism and slavery, political polarization, or the lack of diversity in academia (Keestra et al., 2025). One of its co-founders works in academia, and it has from the start been developed while being employed in numerous educational and research settings as well as during academic conferences.

We surmise that these dialogue methods align especially well with the objectives and conditions of honours education, which are "related to three dimensions of honors teaching: creating community, enhancing academic competence and offering freedom" (Wolfensberger, 2012, p. 148). Our dialogue methods support creating community by inviting more sustained forms of personal and joint reflection and exchange, even including affective and emotional dimensions that are unusual in educational settings. Similarly, the depth of personal reflection and joint articulation against broader interdisciplinary or socio-cultural contexts enhances the ability to address complexity, a key academic competence in honours education. As for the freedom and agency typically attributed to honours education, it is obvious that the kind of engagement and personal disclosure required by these dialogue methods is only possible in a setting where students participate voluntarily. Moreover, both methods invite participatory preparation of dialogue, as both their contents and practical settings can be co-created together by students and teachers. Depending upon educational needs and possibilities, one may choose one of these methods or even combine them, which could demonstrate to participants how differences in dialogue method can be complementary and create a multi-layered experience combining personal growth with mutual empathy and meta-cognitive understanding of oneself and others.

Acknowledgments

After completing the article text, input for Table 2 was drafted with assistance of ChatGPT model 5.6 via the University of Amsterdam's AI-chat on September 12, 2026. Authors reviewed and adjusted all input. No AI was used to generate original content, data, analyses, or references.

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