

## The Six Voices of Logue in Qualitative Inquiry: Prologue, Monologue, Dialogue, Polylogue, Metalogue, and Epilogue

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### ABSTRACT

*This article discusses six types of “voices” noted in the title that we encounter during our lives whether pre-pandemic, pandemic, or post-pandemic as we pursue the exhilarating quest to learn about ourselves and our world. The purpose of this article is to position and contextualize our current experience living in a world that continues to try and outsmart the mutations of the SARS-CoV-2 virus within the context of these six “logues” and how we might incorporate these new understandings into qualitative inquiry. An additional contextual component is the iPhone (and its variants) that also has had a dramatic impact on our lives but in a very different way. It is hoped that readers will critically evaluate this article since it represents the author’s perspective, perceptions, and understanding of why these voices are important in qualitative inquiry and how they interact with memories and the stories that surround them. The extent to which readers utilize these six logues in their own qualitative thinking and inquiries will be the measure of its transferability and usefulness.*

**KEYWORDS:** prologue, monologue, dialogue, polylogue, metalogue, epilogue, iPhone, pandemic, Star Trek, metamemories.

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Although it is not typical to begin an article with a nod of thanks to reviewers, in this case, I think it is appropriate. The most important suggestion of the two reviewers was that there was a need to clearly state the purpose of this article and to organize it in a more coherent manner. Although it is sometimes difficult to accept reviewers’ comments, I realized that indeed while I gushed forth with my own internalized understanding of what I wanted to say, I failed to remind myself that unless readers are provided with a clear pathway, they should not be expected to understand or appreciate what the author is trying to convey. And so, whatever clarity of understanding readers may find below is actually the work of three of us working as a team while I take total responsibility for whatever remains unclear!

There are disparate remembrances that follow related to the iPhone, our experience buying a house, and Star Trek among others. I have included these remembrances because I prefer to write from my own grounding in both memories and metamemories of phenomena (see Bernauer, 2020) and the stories that encapsulate these remembrances that I retrospectively recognize as having lasting impacts on my current understandings and perspectives. While subjectivities in qualitative research are accepted as integral to inquiry, these subjectivities and one’s positionality in relation

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to these subjectivities need to be reflected upon. I would also add that they also need to be celebrated. The purpose of this article is therefore to position and embed these remembrances and stories within the “six voices of logue” in order to further both my own knowledge and understanding and to hopefully do the same for readers. A recent voice that resonated with my own perceptions about memories and stories came from a surprising source: an Emergency Room (ER) physician (Baruch, 2023);

*Healthcare stresses evidence-based practice, clinical decision-making informed by well-designed research studies. However, it's less interested in scholarship that complicates this paradigm. Knowledge is tied to belief, and the greater our confidence in our beliefs, the more likely we'll consider it knowledge. Our confidence in our beliefs, experts say, depends less on the quality of the evidence than the coherence of the story constructed in our minds (p. 8).*

I deeply believe that learning and scholarship is all about change and construction and not stagnant knowledge or transmission. Even libraries which are often viewed as simply repositories of knowledge beckon us to not simply read what others have written but to actively transform and construct our own stories. As far as the question of the generalizability/transferability of findings, I have come to think about this not primarily in terms of applying findings in other contexts and places but rather in terms of how these findings and ways of knowing help to spark other's own creative transformations of what they feel, hear, see, and read which is similar to a phenomenological approach in some ways yet different in others (see Freeman & Muhammad, 2023). To the extent that this occurs among readers is my fondest hope.

As a final note, except where explicitly noted, the quotes that appear at the beginning of each “logue”, were extracted from my daily planner during the years 2002-2022 – there are wisdom and insights to be found in many places. These quotations are a very small subset of what I amassed during these years and were selected because I found them quite relevant to the ideas that I have tried to express. Many thanks to the editors for permitting this breach of protocol regarding citations!

### **Our House, The iPhone, and Star Trek**

We bought our house in 1993 which was built around the year 1930 and features a wood burning stove in the living room that had been inserted into the original fireplace. We found this stove to be quite charming and it played an important role in our deciding to buy this house especially since when we came to view it with our real estate agent, the owner was conveniently seated in front of it with the fire ablaze and with his little daughter on his lap reading a fairytale to her. How could we not buy this lovely house? And so, even though we later experienced trials and tribulations that rivaled those of Tom Hanks in the 1986 movie “The Money Pit”, we plunged ahead and purchased this house and, as of the time of this writing (July, 2023), we still live in it with that same wood burning stove although it has been deactivated for several years now.

Now that you have the context of this story, it is now time to talk about the iPhone. Although the cell phone was first introduced by Martin Cooper in 1973 (see Cooper, 2020), it is the iPhone which was introduced in 2007 and that has arguably been the icon of cell phone technology. My personal realization of the impact that it would have on all of us occurred in 1993 and centers on the aforementioned wood burning stove. Let me explain. While we really wanted to fire-up this stove as soon as we moved in during that winter of 1993, we wisely chose to first have

the chimney inspected to make sure that it was safe. As it turned out, there were parts of the stove and the chimney that needed repaired or replaced. And so, as an expert technician examined our stove, he casually asked me if he could use our phone so he could talk to some other experts. When I handed him our “land line” (remember, no cell phones yet in general use), he dialed-up somebody and I listened as he told the person on the other end of the phone the serial number on the stove. He wrote down some notes in response to whatever this person said, ended the conversation, and then explained to us what parts he would need to purchase, approximately how much they would cost, and when he could come back to fix the stove. It was a perfectly reasonable and satisfying solution to our problem. And then “it” struck me!

The “it” that struck me was what I had just witnessed I had seen previously on Star Trek beginning in 1966—the “communicator” that Captain Kirk (William Shatner) and the crew carried with them to get in touch with the Starship Enterprise when they needed information or assistance. It enabled them to get what they wanted when they needed it no matter where they were so that they could successfully complete their mission. And, that chimney technician’s request to use our landline foreshadowed for me the introduction of the iPhone and its progeny which enable us today to routinely do the incredible things that we now take for granted. This includes not only a built-in camera where video can be integrated with text messages but an array of “apps” that go far beyond voice transmission and enable us to connect to the world in real time using the Internet, access an untold number of data bases, and to monitor and control our personal and work lives by clicking and swiping on a device measuring perhaps 6 inches by 3 inches. The iPhone and its progeny are now ubiquitous in our pockets and purses and although they are now taken for granted, it has truly revolutionized our world for better and at times for worse personally, emotionally, and socially. Perhaps the quote from a character (Mike Lazaridis) in the docudrama “Blackberry” captures the incredible impact of the Smartphone in general; “The person who puts a computer inside a phone will change the world” (Phillips, 2023, p.29). Now to move on to our “logues” while keeping in mind the incredible array of things that mobile technology now allows us to do even though we have now become so accustomed to its wonders that we barely even notice.

These remembrances and stories have served to build a framework (or at least sections of a framework) for conceptualizing the “six voices of logue” that follow. They do so because they reflexively have helped me to appreciate that we are continuously engaged in trying to connect and integrate the individual strands of our experiences in order to achieve what Piaget (1954) termed “equilibrium.” At the same time as we actively engage in exploration of ourselves and the world around us, forces of “disequilibrium” are also at work where on the one hand they may cause disquiet because they do not fit nicely with our current world views, they offer us the opportunity to expand, grow, and enlarge our capacities to appreciate what we do not know or understand. It is an exciting challenge that we all face to continuously create and re-create ourselves and the following six voices will hopefully help us to recognize different ways to engage in these daily acts of creation.

### **The Six Voices of Logue**

It was due in large part to the memories and stories about these memories described above that the concept of the six logues began to emerge. While I will not always make explicit reference to planning and conducting qualitative inquiry, I ask that readers reflect on their own personal and unique ways of knowing and how they may connect to the discussion that follows including perhaps jotting down their own unique remembrances that may or may not be similar to my own but just as poignant. First of all, the term “logue” has its origins in the Greek term “logos” which refers to speech or discourse and then seems to have mutated into a philosophical and theological

search for understanding of ourselves and the world that we live in. In my view, both of these meanings are interconnected since the way that we try and make sense of things is to think, write, and talk about them. I have conceptualized the six logues into prologue, monologue, dialogue, polylogue, metalogue, and epilogue where I added prologue and epilogue almost as an afterthought because they relate almost exclusively to things like movies, novels, and writing. The other four logues reflect my original intention to speak to more generalized life experiences and how these experiences might be investigated using qualitative inquiry. Again, I invite readers to reflect on their own experiences as you read this account since each and every one of our stories are not only unique but when shared with others can help to create a mosaic of understanding that simply is not possible in isolation.

One other device that I use to help convey my emerging understandings of the six logues is the placement of quotes at the beginning of each logue that I found enriched their conceptualization. I recognize that this is yet another strand in this article that needs to be accounted for as readers use their own positionality to construct their own understandings. If they do not help illuminate your own understanding, then feel free to skip over them.

One of the other things that you should know is that I only added these quotes after I had finished writing what I thought was the end of the story. However, as an after-thought I searched through my electronic file where I have collected sayings and expressions for several years from my Franklin Planner, daily newspapers, bumper stickers, and even fortune cookies. Speaking of the latter, whatever they pay those folks who write these sayings should immediately start paying them more—I have found so much wisdom there and best of all, you can legitimately claim it as your own since the writers are anonymous! Seriously, because of this late idea of adding quotes, I ended up changing and editing what I originally wrote because I found that the multiple perspectives about multiple realities were both unsettling as well as stimulating. As quoted under “Metalogue,” Albert Einstein famously said (among hundreds of other gems of his wisdom) that “the more I learn, the more I realize how much I don’t know” and that is certainly the case when you are open to other’s insights whether in dialogue, polylogue, metalogue, or even your own inner reflections and self-talk. I found myself initially placing most quotes under Metalogue since I now think that it is much like the top level of Blooms Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956), or Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1968) and other taxonomies ... don’t we all yearn to reach those top rungs?

I also found myself wanting to build connections to the wonders of our memories as I reviewed my repertoire of quotes and then linking these to ideas and articles that I had previously written. I often advise my doctoral students that when they get to the “For Further Research” section in the last part of their dissertations to not simply engage in a kind of self-flagellation where they want to be sure that readers (and especially their dissertation committee) perceive that they are sufficiently humble and for goodness sakes not dare talk too boldly about generalizability/transferability. Rather, I encourage students to develop a thoughtful agenda for their own future scholarly pursuits—one that will provide a foundation for their future adventurous discoveries. And so, listening to this advice myself, I found pleasure in being able to connect to some of my past work since it forms part of my own scholarly foundation. I hope that readers find at least some value or perhaps even inspiration in what resulted from this mode of inquiry.

I found it very difficult to eliminate quotes since every one of them gave me something to think about. I also found myself continually shifting selected quotes downward from Monologue to Metalogue which is actually upward on the complexity scale. I tried to keep in mind Einstein’s advice that “any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius--and a lot of courage—to move in the opposite direction.” I hope that I at least partially

succeeded in this regard but I think that this can be decided only by readers. My hope is that I discover later what the verdict is. And this concludes the prologue to this article.

## **Prologue**

*Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them.* (Anonymous)

I liken *prologue* to the concept of an “advance organizer” (Ausubel, 1963) that is used to help us organize and structure what we are about to hear or read in relation to our existing knowledge and unique ways of learning. It might be quite unusual to start an article with a prologue that was actually written after an article (or speech) has been written but I thought it might be of value to readers (and myself) to look back at how I went about constructing this article. I say “look back” because even though I write this as beginning remarks, I actually wrote this section when I had just about finished the article—somewhat like history in reverse. However, for those of you who like to read things in chronological order, you can simply come back and read this section later.

Prologues are used both in oral discourse and in written discourse and provide an important context for what is to follow. From the writer’s or speaker’s perspective, a prologue can help us organize our thoughts as we move forward but, just as mentioned earlier, I only wrote this section when I was almost finished with the article. Just like most creative and artistic endeavors, we learn and modify as we move along – it is more an interactive process rather than a linear one. From the reader’s or listener’s perspective, a prologue indeed helps them to prepare their minds and hearts for the story that is to follow.

I think that Abstracts that appear at the beginning of an article not only help readers to identify whether an article meets their needs, they also help writers to organize their articles which requires that it be written interactively as writing proceeds. Of course, you cannot complete an Abstract until the inquiry has been completed, because we learn as we proceed in writing (as in most things). I have found that writing the Abstract concurrently when designing, implementing, and writing up a study not only is an immense help to the writer, it also results in an Abstract that readers will find most valuable. We generally know more than we think we know and this knowledge grows as we write so why not use this to help formulate the Abstract?

When I harken back to the solitary quote at the beginning of this section and to the experiences I presented in the prior sections, it becomes clearer that the past, present, and future merge continuously when we engage in research and scholarly inquiry. Prologue should therefore be seen and appreciated for the tripart nexus that it represents. Prologue sets our minds on a path that enables us and our readers to begin the process of self-construction which I have found to be the case here.

## **Monologue**

*Blessed is the man, who having nothing to say, abstains from giving wordy evidence of the fact.* (George Eliot)

*Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can’t, and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it.* (Robert Frost)

*We do not talk—we bludgeon one another with facts and theories gleaned from cursory readings of newspapers, magazines and digests.* (Henry Miller)

When we use the term “monologue” we may think about a stand-up comedian who entertains us with his wit and humor like Johnny Carson who was famous for his monologue from 1962-1992 on “The Tonight Show.” On the other hand, a negative connotation is sometimes applicable such as when an individual monopolizes a conversation by not allowing others to speak such as when professors lecture non-stop while their students feverishly try and write down what they say even though they may not understand nor care about these lecture-monologues.

One of the more intriguing questions is whether Lev Vygotsky’s conception of “Private Speech” (Vygotsky, 1978) is a monologue or a dialogue with oneself. For those not familiar with this concept, private speech is like talking to yourself in a subdued voice perhaps mumbling or barely moving one’s lips. Sometimes, of course, we talk or laugh to ourselves aloud which may cause others to wonder about our state-of-mind which is why I invented the abbreviation “LS” for “laugh silently” when in a public setting versus “LOL” (laugh out loud). In any event, for purposes of this present article, please consider private speech as monologue while keeping our options open.

When we consider monologue in its various interpretations, we are left with a form of communication or “logue” where we must rely heavily on our ability to listen to whomever is speaking—even if it is ourselves. Some might even consider books and other written language as well as art, film, and plays as monologue since we do not have much opportunity to respond, although we can “reflect” on what is said or seen, and thus engage in a type of dialogue although in modern parlance it is asynchronous rather than synchronous. Of course, these latter two terms are associated with online learning which came to play a more significant part in our lives with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and may (or may not) continue to be a significant part of our lives in the future if the variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus continue to mutate. Monologue has played a significant part in our lives since time immemorial and will presumably continue to do so in a post-Covid world even if post-Covid becomes something like flu season and is a perennial part of our lives.

In relation to the iPhone, we can now use cell phones to access databases, YouTube videos, games, apps to control our home appliances etc. as a type of monologue although again, there might be a certain degree of reflection that accompanies these excursions into cyberspace thus meriting perhaps a higher degree of affirmation because they may touch upon higher levels of the famous Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956) such as application or analysis. It appears that “monologuing” may have increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic as individuals sought ways to engage virtually albeit without any live interaction.

## **Reflections on Monologue**

I recognized retrospectively that I selected the three quotes listed at the beginning of this section because of my inherent negative view of monopolizing conversations whether in the classroom or in life—including when I do it myself. I remember about ten years ago when I was teaching a group of practicing teachers that I stopped in midsentence as I was lauding the merits of a “student-centered” teaching approach because it struck me that I was doing the very opposite! I was too busy lecturing students instead of inviting them to share their own experiences and insights about this topic—I was “talking the talk but not walking the walk.” Based on this pivotal experience, I gradually began to internalize the maxim that “if there are 20 students in the classroom, there are 21 potential teachers” whether I was teaching undergraduate, masters, or

doctoral students no matter the subject matter and regardless whether it was online or in a traditional classroom setting. I do think that the subject matter mediates how this approach is used (for example, I have found that statistical procedures require more teacher voice than some other courses that I teach), but even with this type of class, I have been able to “flip” instruction and hopefully create a more student-centered classroom approach.

## Dialogue

*One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.* (Bryant H. McGill)

*No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.*  
(Robin Williams)

*To think is to speak low. To speak is to think aloud.* (F. Max Mueller)

*Perhaps you will forget tomorrow the kind words you say today, but the recipient may cherish them over a lifetime.* (Dale Carnegie)

*Get you facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.*  
(Mark Twain)

*By listening, one will learn truths. By hearing, one will only learn half-truths.* (Fortune Cookie-Angor Restaurant, Pittsburgh, PA., May 6, 2022)

The term *dialogue* is commonly used to denote a conversation among multiple persons; however, in order to try and preserve distinctions among the logues, I will use it to describe communication between two individuals and reserve conversations among more than two individuals to *polylogue*. The art of listening demands more attention and effort than does simply hearing and this is especially true when we conduct interviews. However, sometimes when we are engaged in a dialogue, the other person may say “I hear you” where they mean that they understand what it is you are trying to communicate. In this sense, it seems that hearing and listening mean the same thing. So, what exactly is dialogue versus monologue? While listening is certainly a critical component, each person also needs to contribute something meaningful to the conversation that somehow connects to the reason why a conversation was started in the first place. In other words, a real dialogue needs to have something more important than the weather or else it is simply a parallel monologue versus an interaction of thoughts and feelings between two individuals.

Engaging in a dialogue also requires that we “bracket” our own beliefs to some degree or else we end up with the kind of political “debates” that often beset us like aspiring politicians who apparently believe that to agree with their opponent to even a small degree might lose them votes. It is indeed a challenge to listen and to even agree with some arguments especially when they concern deeply held beliefs like politics or religion. In fact, we often avoid bringing up these topics and their variants such as abortion, transgender, and welfare because most of us want to avoid unnecessary conflict. The problem, of course, is that by failing to talk about these issues we block creative solutions that might be generated as a result of rich dialogue or perhaps even a deeper understanding of the issue and empathy with those who hold contrary views. The recent/continuing pandemic for example gave rise to violent disagreements regarding mandatory vaccinations. Of course, these disagreements were exacerbated by the confusion caused by sometimes conflicting

guidelines which was in turn exacerbated by our lack of knowledge and understanding of this hopefully once-in-a-lifetime assault on virtually every aspect of our lives. Nonetheless, it would seem that honest and open dialogue absent political vitriol might go a long way to finding amicable and effective solutions. As far as qualitative inquiry, when using interviews as a data collection tool, we are constantly reminded that we must be careful to be impartial and to not lead participants to respond in a way that we want them to respond but must allow them to answer in their own way. While this advice is important and consistent with inquiry that is deemed “scientific,” I believe that it is also impossible to follow if we think that interviews just like conversations require authentic and genuine sharing and caring. Perhaps we need to think about interviews as “focused conversations” where the emphasis is on genuine conversation that is circumscribed by the research questions that we seek get answer. I think that to attain this kind of balance we must recognize that all human interactions are more art than science.

Roger von Oech said “one of the major factors which differentiates creative people from lesser creative people is that creative people pay attention to their small ideas” which brings up another dimension of dialogue and that is conversations that we might have with ourselves. While “talking to yourself” was seen by Piaget (1954) as an early stage of development that he thought of as egocentric speech and also that when children play together as a “collective monologue”, Vygotsky (1978) as noted under *Monologue* thought that “private speech” is a positive attribute for promoting cognitive development. I generally side with Vygotsky on this issue because we all need to slow our frantic minds and emotions by quietly enunciating what we are thinking or what we should do next in order to solve problems or plan our day. In fact, I would argue that dialogue with ourselves is both common place and helpful for clarifying our thoughts and ideas—I for one surely find this to be a daily routine!

As far as the iPhone, while we might think that this wondrous invention would promote a healthy and richer environment for dialogue, it seems, at least to me, that the very ubiquity of the cell phone has caused us to devalue rich conversation and listening and has seemingly produced a generation(s) that does not know how to engage in dialogue but rather sees genuine dialogue as an outmoded way to make wants known; consequently, we sometimes find ourselves rushing through conversations by quickly providing bits and bytes of information. Of course, this negative observation could simply be the rantings of a baby boomer lamenting Millennials and Gen Z just like the “Greatest Generation” probably lamented what they had brought forth. In fact, as a bona fide baby boomer, I must admit that I often use my cell to call friends and family when I am in my car traveling to or from work or an errand so I will have a ready-made excuse to end the call when I arrive at my destination. In other words, the foundation of the phone call is often built on the expedient to simply convey information, discharge an obligation, or at best to “converse” in order to fulfill the basic human need to talk to somebody and share pleasantries.

## **Reflections on Dialogue**

First of all, notice that while there are three quotes for Monologue there are six quotes at the beginning of Dialogue as well as one embedded in the text and I have a feeling that there will be progressively more quotes as I move on to Polylogue and Metalogue. I think that the reason for this is because these higher levels of interaction are simply more interesting as well as more complex and so perhaps more has been said about them. It may also be the case that as I curated the quotes in my collection, I was simply drawn more to these higher genres. In any event, these six quotes span the spectrum from the practical to the humorous with insightful words of substance in between. On a personal note, I find it quite difficult to listen to others attentively before jumping in with my own thoughts. I think that one reason that I do this is because I am afraid that I am going



to forget what I want to say if I delay saying it. And, if I do manage to silence myself, I find that I keep repeating my own ideas to myself privately (private speech?) so that I do not forget and consequently I don't really listen nor understand what the other person is saying. This predilection is especially poignant when it comes to interviewing others and I need to remember this as I walk the tightrope between scientific objectivity with its "bracketing" versus engaging in genuine interactive conversation. I have often thought about inventing some kind of device where I could store my thoughts like an external hard drive that I could then access when the other person is done speaking and thereby relieve my anxiety about forgetting what I want to say. Thus far, I have failed in this product development enterprise and continue to envy those individuals who seemingly can give full attention to others as they speak and when it is their turn to speak, they are able to connect their ideas to what was said with no apparent anxiety about forgetting their thoughts. I suppose in the meantime, I will continue my product development quest and hopefully learn a better strategy from others for listening rather than just hearing.

### **Polylogue**

*The newest computer can merely compound, at speed, the oldest problem in the relations between human beings, and in the end the communicator will be confronted with the old problem, of what to say and how to say it.* (Edward R. Murrow)

*Conversation may be compared to a lyre with seven cords-philosophy, art, poetry, politics, love, scandal, and the weather.* (Anna Brownell Jameson)

*Tell your own story, and you will be interesting.* (Louise Bourgeois)

*Every man hears only what he understands.* (Goethe)

Here is where we try to engage in group discussion involving more than two individuals whether in a real setting or online via Zoom, Google Meet, or some other platform. Of course, digital polylogue, just like monologue, got a real boost from the COVID-19 pandemic when schools and corporations learned to work remotely except for those who were required to be in the real setting such as hospital staff, emergency workers, and those who had to deal with actual material goods such as truck drivers and bricklayers. Others, whose work could be done digitally and remotely were able to work from home by using a computer in conjunction with application software and some kind of digital communication platform where they could manipulate data and solve problems in a virtual group setting. In addition, doctoral students working on their dissertations, especially those using focus groups (as well as individual interviews) as a data collection method in qualitative inquiry during the pandemic, found that indeed technology can often be an effective substitute for live on-site sessions.

As an online instructor, I have found both synchronous and asynchronous approaches to be effective ways to engage students in polylogue learning. I have been teaching online at the doctoral level ever since my university began an online program in 2012 as a complement to the traditional classroom program. I had experience teaching online prior to doctoral teaching; however, I must say in retrospect that I would probably give myself a C grade at best for these early online experiences since I was under the illusion that uploading a syllabus and assignments interspersed with occasional announcements, constituted effective online instruction. Fortunately, by the time I began online doctoral instruction I recognized the primacy of teaching presence (Bhatty, 2020) and

worked diligently to put this essential component into practice by regularly engaging in asynchronous conversations with students, hosting synchronous sessions as needed, and generally trying to make students feel like they were of central importance during these virtual encounters. I must humbly say that based on student feedback it seems like I have generally succeeded in this task. However, in the Spring term of 2022, I encountered a challenge that was entirely unexpected when I was assigned to teach a course in the traditional classroom setting that I had been teaching online for ten years and it jolted my confidence in engaging students in polylogue! I am still trying to make sense of this unique turn of events by exploring this issue in collaboration with one of the doctoral students in this class as well as the director of the doctoral program. Because of this, what I write next will assuredly be incomplete but at least I can share how this challenge relates to polylogue.

I had achieved a certain measure of success teaching online and while I knew that moving back to the traditional classroom would entail some challenges, I was confident that they would be minor. This illusion lasted for perhaps two classes when the students convinced me through words and actions that an approach designed to teach online did not work in the traditional classroom setting. While details will be lacking here since trying to understand the ramifications of this experience must await collaborative efforts with colleagues, let me say that this transformation ended well because I eventually was reminded to put students first—not goals and methods. Just like online teaching, genuine listening and engagement came to define our polylogue in the traditional classroom setting. I re-applied the advice of Cooper and Garner who argue convincingly in the “New Three R’s” that **R**elationships must proceed **R**elevance which must precede **R**igor if you want to create a “learning classroom” versus a “managed classroom” (Cooper & Garner, 2012)

One of my first personal encounters with polylogue using technology occurred when the pandemic first began in early 2020. As a subscriber to a local theater that staged plays, this theater experimented with using a digital platform where subscribers watched plays online not as a filmed production but rather where the actors performed their lines with genuine emotion while gesturing to the actors on the screen to whom lines were being directed. Surprisingly these performances were simply marvelous! Here were actors without the benefit of an actual stage interacting in multiple conversations while the audience was simultaneously able to offer their thoughts and observations with online “chats.” Technology continues to evolve and with emerging variants of how it can be used in qualitative inquiry.

Lessons learned apply not only in educational settings but in family and social settings as well. By first establishing relationships, we create the necessary foundation of respect and sense of caring (Bernauer, Bernauer, & Bernauer, 2017) to facilitate polylogue. Relevance means that we seek and build on common ground whether in the classroom or elsewhere and try to offer meaningful comments so that new knowledge can begin to emerge between and among all participants. While rigor is often presented as the most essential component of academic (or any other kind) of excellence, my own take on this based on teaching undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students (as well as with my own son) is that if we place rigor before relationships and relevance, while we may win the fealty of a few gifted individuals in the area we are teaching, training, or coaching, that most individuals even if they “pass” the course, test, or other criterion of success will not leave our classrooms or families with the positive attitude and mindset that is arguably of much greater importance in the long run.

Quality polylogue is vital in our classrooms, families, and nation because it is only through this kind of group discussion that we can fully unleash both our own creative potential as well as that of others including in research settings. Through such polylogue we can co-create the kind of knowledge in the spaces among and between us which can then be re-constructed by each of us in our own unique way when we engage in qualitative inquiry. And it is Constructivist Learning

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Theory (based on the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and John Dewey, among others) that seems to provide the best way to understand how the interactions among individuals engaged in polylogue can result in significant leaps in human knowledge and understandings. The iPhone (as well as other media) can be used to facilitate polylogue which can be quite effective as I recently discovered in a family tele-medicine meeting regarding required medical care for loved ones which the pandemic forced upon us.

### **Reflections on Polylogue**

The more that I think about polylogue, based on both the opening quotes and what I have written above, I find that I now want even more to create a culture in my classroom, family, and social contexts where I “tell my own story” while also listening (not just *hearing*) to the stories told by others. Failing to recognize the uniqueness of each individual in a group setting and empathetically listening to them (even if we are anxious that we may forget what we want to say—see Dialogue) is probably at the heart of most of our social woes and divides. As far as the iPhone and its progeny, I think that technology (like most things in life) can be a force for good or evil depending on contextual considerations and whether moderation rather than excess is the rule. Communicating in a meaningful way with others must emanate from who we are as individuals while we simultaneously practice the art of listening to others because we recognize that we can learn from each person while we reciprocate in kind by offering our own genuine and caring insights. Both in research and in life, this is a quest that seems worthy of our efforts!

### **Metalogue**

*The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know.* (Albert Einstein)

*Sometimes the heart sees what's invisible to the eye.* (Alfred Lord Tennyson)

*Good instincts usually tell you what to do long before your head has figured it out.* (Michael Burke)

*Someday you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again.* (C.S. Lewis)

*Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.* (Robert Frost)

*We cannot teach people anything; we can only help them discover it within themselves.* (Galileo Galilei)

*I know that I don't know what I don't know.* (Marguerite Yourcenar)

*True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us.* (Socrates)

*The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.* (Albert Einstein)

*I try to avoid looking forward or backward and try to keep looking upward.*  
(Charlotte Bronte)

*There are two statements about human beings that are true: that all human beings are alike, and that all are different. On those two facts all human wisdom is founded.* (Mark Van Doren, American poet, 1894-1972.)

*We do not remember days, we remember moments.* (Cesare Pavese)

*Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward.*  
(Soren Kierkegaard)

As I predicted under Dialogue, I would probably find myself collecting a greater number of quotes as I moved onto Polylogue and Metalogue and indeed this turned out to be the case—before I whittled my selected quotes down to 13, I preselected 39 quotes that I perceived to be related to Metalogue. This whittling was a most difficult task since all of the quotes offered unique insights into both Metalogue as well as into qualitative inquiry. Unfortunately—or fortunately, I know not which—we humans must still engage in reductionism at some point in our inquiries since, while our creativity may be limitless, our capacities to analyze, interpret, and understand phenomena are circumscribed by our inherent limitations.

Our discussions regarding monologue, dialogue, and polylogue have probably not created much criticism or elicited many “aha moments” among readers. However, I think that the still-emerging conceptualization of metalogue is transformational because, while it entails elements of the preceding logues, it goes well beyond them and results in something that incorporates these logues into a gestalt that is more than the sum of the component logues. What does this mysterious logue look like and how might it be related to qualitative inquiry? I would argue that athletics, books, movies, art, music, theatre, sculpture, dance, poetry, etc. reflect metalogue because they almost magically take an entire spectrum of learning and experiences and transforms these into something new that may surprise even the person who creates it. However, if individuals are not authentically engaged in what they read, see, or experience and do not construct their own meanings, they cannot enter into conversational metalogue (whether in person, synchronously, or asynchronously) but rather may perceive everything as simply monologue that often results in surface knowledge rather than deep or “robust knowledge” (see Richey & Nokes-Malach, 2015) as often happens to recipients of uninspired lectures, speeches, sermons, and research reports.

A legitimate question is whether “consumers” of creative works or participants in qualitative inquiry can actually become partners in metalogue. I think that the short answer is “yes” provided that there is a parallel attempt to create unique yet shared meanings as in both dialogue and polylogue; that is, that participants through inspiration and motivation become co-creators. These kinds of encounters are characterized by an excitement that punctuates conversation, painting, playing, sculpting, writing, and other creative endeavors. I am reminded of the affirmation by the late Harry Wolcott’s (2009) powerful words where he said that “I have come to the belief that people whose lives are involved with the written word can be divided into roughly two groups: those who mostly read and those who mostly write” (pp. 17–18). While I do not hold either of these predilections to be superior, it seems that writing is more akin to the transformational act that can create metalogue. For those of you who are avid readers please do not take offense at this statement

since I am aware that reading well is an art of great merit in and of itself (see, for example, Adler, 1940). However, I think that for metalogue to occur whether in the arts, crafts, music, or sciences, something unique must be created that “speaks” to others via varied and multiple mediums. I am reminded also of the movie *Apollo XIII* where the space crew is stranded and requires the creative application of materials designed for one thing to be used for other things, sometimes referred to as bricolage. Based on true events, this movie shows us how creatively and collaboratively working to transform objects and tools into new creations represent the fruits of metalogue.

Metalogue brings us back full circle to the other “logues.” Both revolutionary technology such as the iPhone and revolutionary events such as the COVID-19 pandemic can promote metalogue if we remember to keep our eyes, ears, hearts, and brains open to what we experience and create in our own unique way something that conveys our insights to others both now and in the future. Through sharing our insights and questions with both the present and future generations, we can become instigators of heuristic inquiry rather than only conveyors of static knowledge that is continuously being transformed and re-interpreted which seems to offer a wonderful and unique opportunity for qualitative researchers.

### **Reflections on Metalogue**

I was struck by the quote by Cesare Pavese “We do not remember days, we remember moments.” This quote adds richness to Metalogue in terms of how memory and experience affect this most esoteric form of logue. I have previously written about memory including what I referred to as “Metamemories” which I coined well-before I came to read or think about the concept of Metalogue (Bernauer, 2020). I have a feeling that others (especially artists, composers, musicians, novelists, poets, playwrights, and screen writers) have plumbed these concepts and ideas in rich and varied ways over centuries. When it comes to writing, Wolcott (2009) describes his hope that his writing is not looked upon as monologue but rather what I have described as metalogue;

*By its very nature, however, writing does produce a sort of monologue, a monologue in which one individual monopolizes the conversation, albeit in written rather than spoken form. I wince when anyone refers to something I have written as a monologue, wondering if perhaps that is exactly the word they intend. You have no opportunity to tell me why you chose to read this, what kind of information would be most helpful, or where you would like me to begin. I must more or less “make you up” as I go along, trying to anticipate what brings you to this reading and to address those concerns. More important, just as in lecturing, I must try to convince you that I know what I am talking about, so you will attend to the problems that I identify rather than remain singularly preoccupied with your own (p. xii).*

In a recent virtual conversation with colleagues when I asked how they thought about and used the term “meta”, it sparked some very interesting comments. For example, Marti Snyder replied,

*Great question. I guess the word “meta” alone means going beyond, or transcending. I’m using meta within the context of the metaverse (as a new space beyond what we’ve mostly experienced on the Internet). The metaverse is a 3D model of the Internet. You can access the metaverse either through a computer browser or headset or head mounted display*

*(HMD) like the Oculus Quest, HaloLens, etc. You can meet up with people and have real time interactions in this immersive space. Meta (formerly Facebook's) workrooms is a cool example of this. There are a bunch of separate metaverses that are, right now, not connected. Examples include Fortnite, Roblox (e.g., Nikeland when you can go and dress avatars in virtual Nike gear), Decentraland, Sandbox. You can attend virtual concerts, art exhibits, conferences, etc. The metaverse even has its own economy that is run through crypto currency and blockchain technology.*

I responded thusly:

*Perhaps our whole fascination with “meta” stuff is a continuing evolution away from our rationalistic view of the universe to try and paint a more complete picture of reality. So, instead of continuing to only try to parcel out variables that can be analyzed in a linear fashion perhaps it reflects our growing awareness that we need to use not only mixed-methods but also mixed-paradigms in conjunction with emerging technologies to achieve a fuller understanding and appreciation of what's both inside us as well as the outer layers of reality including spatially, chronologically, historically, philosophically, psychologically, sociologically, spiritually, ...*

## Epilogue

*A country can be judged by the quality of its proverbs. German proverb Chronos is time looked at in measured moments. Kairos is being lost in a timeless experience that cannot be measured. Like the first moments of loving someone deeply and not being conscious of time. (Fr. Bertrand Buber, personal communication)*

While I have tried to create and to convey my own understanding of “logue”, it is the “voices” within each of us that we must be attuned to if we really want to engage in genuine dialogue, polylogue, and metalogue as we go about conducting qualitative inquiry. The term “conversation” whether with oneself or with others captures at least for me the essence of both dialogue and polylogue. However, the art of conversation, just like the art of reading and writing requires disciplined work (Adler, 1983). Garner (2022) when describing conversation as an art, cites the website for the Century Association whose “major criterion for membership is being a good conversationalist” and states that members can be “of any occupation as long as their breadth of interests and qualities of mind and imagination make them sympathetic, stimulating, and congenial companions in a society of authors and artists” (p. 43). Here we see the need for integration of all of the logues—I wonder about the stress level of those who feel deeply that they must meet these criteria!

One thing that I wanted to add that seems to be connected all of the logues is the concept of time and how the perception of time has been altered by the COVID-19 pandemic especially in 2020-2022 when quarantine became a common term. The quote by Fr. Bertrand Buby “Chronos is time looked at in measured moments. Kairos is being lost in a timeless experience that cannot be measured. Like the first moments of loving someone deeply and not being conscious of time” adds a dimension of our lived experiences that we should well consider when conducting deep and rich inquiries. As reported in TIME magazine (Rothman, 2023), there has been an explosion of inquiries

related to time and the perception of time as a result of the pandemic where “life stopped, but time continued” (p. 39). Writing itself seems to joggle the neurons in the brain to enable both memories and their interconnections with the present as happened to me when I described earlier under Polylogue the enactment of a virtual play during the early days of the pandemic whose memory only arose as I was thinking about technology and how it has transformed how we can conduct interviews and focus groups. However, as I thought about this experience and discussed it with my wife, we concurred that this event seems like it occurred a lifetime ago rather than barely three years ago. The warping of time and the perceptions of time seems to have formed an envelope around all of our lives which is consistent with the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and his Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) where he later added the “chronosystem” to the other layers of influences that surround the individual. Lest we think that the importance of time just surfaced during the pandemic, the first International Conference on Timing and Time Perception actually took place in 2014. However, I think that its impact on our lives rapidly accelerated as a result of the global pandemic. As a result, I think that perhaps qualitative inquiry needs to become more sensitive to time as a major influencer on human life as we continue to evolve both conceptually and methodologically. Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it has affected our predictions based on existing data about the economy, inflation, traffic patterns, etc., Allison Schrage says;

It is unusual for the world to change so much in such a short amount of time, but it offers a valuable lesson that we will probably forget: Data is only a guide, and never a replacement for our own judgment. Going forward, we’ll have to take all the predictions, big and small, with some skepticism and balance them with our own personal experience.” Pittsburgh Post Gazette, July 8, 2022, in an article “The Data Will Enslave and Mislead You”, p. A9.

This speaks to me of metalogue and how experience, feelings, and insights are critical components of qualitative inquiry. I offer the following YouTube link to a music video that my son created in the midst of the pandemic. Let me warn you that it uses some rough language so please be forewarned. However, being a part of this “lived experience” I can honestly say that this metalogue captures much of the angst that continues to surround us as of this writing while still in the pandemic or perhaps a post-pandemic with residual trappings. While it is in one sense monologue, I think that if you are open to its message, it can create an ongoing metalogue for all of us. In any event, the music that you will see and hear is a voice of discovery that I hope speaks to you as it has to me. You be the judge and feel free to engage in any and all the logues that come to mind!

<sup>2</sup>As I near the end of this article, I would like to share a very recent experience that I had attending a phone conference with a physician who was caring for a family member who had suffered heart failure. I must tell you that I was so impressed by not only this doctor’s knowledge but also his humility. While he led us through the results of various tests and answered our questions patiently, he also let us know that he did not have all the answers in terms of long-term outcomes and other questions although the patient had positive markers in several area which were encouraging. In a quiet yet humorous voice he responded to my queries by saying, “unfortunately when I graduated from medical school, they gave me a diploma and not a crystal ball.” We all laughed and appreciated both his concern and competence as well as his self-deprecation that showed me that he recognized that he was indeed in “practice” and that he was still learning. He also said that, even though he was able to understand test results that they all had to be interpreted within the context of each patient. This conversation was indeed a satisfying polylogue that led to metalogue.

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<sup>2</sup> Here is the video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyYnMyYXO7I>

Now what made this polylogue even more interesting was that when we ended the call, two other participants entered the picture. Two relatives were actually in the patient’s room while three of us were engaged in the phone conversation with the doctor and the contrast in perceptions was striking. While the polylogue/metalogue left us (especially me) with a most satisfying aftertaste, the two participants in the patient’s room later talked about the apparent pain that the patient was experiencing and concerns about a lack of liquids. The impression conveyed by these follow-up voices who had “boots on the ground” painted a different picture of the reality of the patient’s well-being than what we were left with following our phone conversation with the doctor. This stuck me as the differences we find between a scientific view of the world and a naturalistic one, between abstraction and tests versus observation and listening to the voices both around us and within us. As I continue to reflect on this apparent dissonance, I am struck by the complementary nature of quantitative/scientific data and qualitative/naturalistic data. The evidence presented in these various “logues” yearns to be integrated within a larger theoretical framework whether one of holistic health versus specialization or more accurately including specialization or perhaps a more integrative view of education where terms such as online, onground, virtual, and technology come to be viewed as threads within a larger tapestry of learning. It struck me that both qualitative and quantitative data of necessity must be integrated because, if they are viewed within an appropriate larger theoretical framework, “paradigm wars” can truly be forever disbanded just like we try to disband wars with, of course, only partial success. Finally, I think that Wolcott’s concern with his writing seems to reflect the need for a “conversational approach” (see for example, Adyanga, 2022; Bernauer, Chatfield, Cooper, Lichtman, Mangrum, & Snyder, et al., 2022). While such writing may not be perceived to be “academic” by some, I have found it can capture the essence of both polylogue and metalogue as described in this paper in a way that goes beyond formal academic writing. The same ER doctor that was quoted in the Introduction (Baruch, 2023) went on to say:

*We must be willing to interrogate our story-building process as rigorously as our research methods. What stories are we listening for, what assumptions or beliefs are we bringing into the story, and how are these value judgments influencing the stories we hear? (p. 10).*

I find these words to be authentic to what we bring to any inquiry and to life itself. It is the recognition and appreciating of each of our unique voices that ultimately really matters.

To conclude, I fully subscribe to the notion that “writing is thinking” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 18). Actually, I think it is probably more correct to say that writing is a part of thinking or a type of thinking that, just like qualitative and quantitative data and our various voices, should be understood for what they are; an orchestra whose instruments and voices can and should be appreciated both as solos (monologues) as well as the full orchestral production of dialogues, polylogues, and metalogues. Regarding quotes, I conclude with this final one attributed to Thomas Macaulay an English historian: “Nothing is so useless as a general maxim.” Yes, life is too complex, exciting, and full of potential for discovery to limit our perspectives based on selected maxims because life itself offers us the opportunity to enjoy all of our voices as we engage in ongoing conversations with both ourselves and others on our journeys of exploration and discovery.



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