

# Planning the 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues: Reflection on Personalities, Politics & Power

DLOG 790, Practicum Written Brief

SFU Certificate in Dialogue & Civic Engagement

Bill McIntosh, April 24, 2015



## 1. Introduction

The idea for this project glimmered to life on a fall evening in 2012, in a crowded meeting room at the Vancouver Public Library, as I attended the launch of Dr. David Boyd's new book, *The Right to a Healthy Environment: Revitalizing Canada's Constitution*.<sup>1</sup> Co-hosted by the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) and Ecojustice (EJ), the event was a great success. Dr. Peter Robinson, DSF's CEO, and Devon Page, Ecojustice's Executive Director, warmed up the full house. Then Dr. Boyd laid out the case for action on the absence of protection of the environment and environmental rights in Canada's Constitution. It was apparent the audience shared a sense of community, even fellowship. Penetrating questions confirmed understanding of the complex issues, and there was strong agreement on the need for constitutional protection of the environment—unlike the polarized discourse often heard at public meetings on matters at the intersection of economic development and environmental protection. "Might informed, inclusive public dialogue enhance the breadth and diversity of support for constitutional protection of the environment?" I wondered.

## 2. The Blue Dot Initiative

Over the next two years, staff and volunteers at DSF and EJ worked with Dr. Boyd and others to lay the groundwork for the Blue Dot initiative<sup>2</sup>: a campaign to build a national citizens' movement; calling on local communities to pass municipal declarations respecting people's right to live in a healthy environment; then on provinces to pass environmental bills of rights, and finally on Parliament to include recognition of the right to a healthy environment in Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

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<sup>1</sup> Boyd, David R. 2012 *The Right to a Healthy Environment: Revitalizing Canada's Constitution*. UBC Press: Vancouver

<sup>2</sup> <http://bluedot.ca/the-plan/>

To call this constitutional reform project “difficult” is an understatement. Literally dozens of attempts to include environmental rights in Canada’s Constitution, going back to 1969, have failed.<sup>3</sup> Examining why Canada stands with countries like Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States—in contrast to at least 94 other countries<sup>4</sup>—in failing to protect their citizens’ substantive right to live in a healthy environment, is beyond the scope of this paper. It will suffice to note that the issues are complex, powerful interests oppose even the recognition of such a right, and securing its protection in our Constitution will be legally and politically difficult.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. BLUE DOT DIALOGUES: the Concept

During that same two-year period, I had a number of conversations and emails with Dr. Boyd, Mr. Page and Dr. Robinson, discussing the inclusion of a public dialogue process in the Blue Dot campaign. In November 2014 I sent DSF my concept paper, *BLUE DOT DIALOGUES: Building Together on Common Ground*,<sup>6</sup> which advised:

The mobilization of the Blue Dot campaign’s natural supporters<sup>7</sup> will be crucial to building the political pressure needed to drive change, but will not be enough to build broad understanding that constitutional protection of the right of all Canadians to a healthy environment goes hand-in-hand with a healthy, sustainable economy. Also required is an inclusive public dialogue among a broad cross-section of Canadians—whose demographics, interests, hopes and fears reflect the diversity of our national identity.

The planning, organizing and convening of an inclusive, informed dialogue process on the scale contemplated here calls for a partnership of progressive organizations and institutions: able to muster significant human and financial resources for a long-term effort, and willing to work with traditional adversaries toward identifying common values on environmental

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 3 of Boyd’s *The Right to a Healthy Environment*, supra, for a depressing historical account.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>5</sup> Venton, M. 2009. *Restoring the Balance: Recognition of Environmental Rights in British Columbia*. Ecojustice, formerly Sierra Legal Defence Fund. 27-36. At page 28: “[T]he amending formula requires the support of the Senate and the House of Commons as well as two-thirds of the provinces that have at least 50% of the population of all the provinces. This process may be commenced by the Senate, the House of Commons or the Legislative Assembly of any province.”

<sup>6</sup> Appendix “A” at page 18.

<sup>7</sup> i.e. environmentally aware and politically progressive communities, whose engagement will inevitably trigger the mobilization of their traditional opponents and thus the compounding and perpetuation of Canada’s current political gridlock and polarization on issues involving development and transportation of energy and natural resources.

and economic issues. Ideally, the partners, sponsors and conveners<sup>8</sup> of the Blue Dot Dialogues will work together from the outset of the project, “... in a way that builds a sense of ownership among key parties to it, by engaging them in shaping the design process.”<sup>9</sup>

In December 2014 DSF<sup>10</sup> and EJ<sup>11</sup> agreed in principle to include a “diverse and inclusive public dialogue initiative” in the Blue Dot campaign, subject to funding.

#### 4. The 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues: a Proposal

##### a. Project Funding: Application for a Law Foundation of BC Grant of \$50,000

The rigorous application requirements for a 2015 Law Foundation of BC large project grant<sup>12</sup> (particularly the firm deadline of noon, January 15, 2015) and the funding limit of \$50,000 engaged my DSF colleagues in working with me to think through the objectives, deliverables, evaluation metrics, and resources required to conduct the proposed public dialogues. I did the primary concept development and drafting, but the overall creative process was collaborative, with several drafts debated and revised over the first two weeks of January.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix A at page 23. BLUE DOT DIALOGUES: Potential Partners, Sponsors and Conveners.

<sup>9</sup> Pruitt, B and Thomas, P. 2009. *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners*. 87. Stockholm: International IDEA. 78. At page 79: “[T]here are significant benefits to co-design:

- a stronger sense of ownership of and responsibility for the process—a basis for satisfaction on the psychological dimension
- a design that is informed by multiple perspectives and concerns—a basis for satisfaction on the substantive dimension
- clarity among the actors about the process and its underlying logic—a basis for satisfaction on the process dimension

A co-design process enriched by preparatory training can further enhance all these benefits. Training sessions can raise awareness about process issues such as the principles of dialogue and the dialogic approach. Dialogue participants tend to focus mainly on the issues. Raising their awareness of the role of process, while engaging them in designing a dialogue, can help develop capacities that may be critical to the immediate success of the dialogue initiative and to achieving long-term objectives for societal change.”

<sup>10</sup> December 10, 2014 meeting at DSF’s Vancouver office (Dr. Peter Robinson, CEO, and Bill McIntosh): Dr. Robinson asked me to lead the preparation of DSF’s application to the Law Foundation of BC (LFBC) for a 2015 grant of \$50,000 to fund a series of public dialogues in support of the Blue Dot initiative; and to commence discussions on DSF’s behalf with EJ and the SFU Centre for Dialogue (SFU), soliciting their participation in the dialogue project.

<sup>11</sup> December 18, 2014 meeting at Ecojustice’s Vancouver office (Devon Page, Executive Director, Darcie Bennett, Director of Communications & Marketing, Ecojustice, and Bill McIntosh: Mr. Page committed EJ’s legal, communications and promotional (but not financial) support for the proposed dialogues.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.lawfoundationbc.org/project-funding/large-projects/>

On January 15, 2015 DSF submitted its application to the Law Foundation of BC (LFBC) for a project grant of \$50,000 to fund the 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues (BCBDD): two public forums, each to engage 30 – 50 British Columbians in discussing issues underlying the Blue Dot campaign. The first forum is to be held in the fall of 2015 and the second in the spring of 2016. The project's overall objectives manifest the inherent tension between two core goals: on the one hand, enhancing civic engagement in the Blue Dot campaign for protection of the environment and environmental rights in Canada's Constitution; and on the other hand, generating a diverse, inclusive and respectful process for public dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

In mid-February LFBC confirmed the short-listing of DSF's grant application and the imminent interviewing of our nine project references;<sup>14</sup> and advised that the 2015 Law Foundation project grants will be awarded by the LFBC Board of Governors at their June 27, 2015 meeting.

#### **b. 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues Convenor: Mandate and Selection?**

From the outset of the planning process, a core concept of the BCBDD project has been that the proposed public discussions should be convened by an independent body, known and respected for commitment to fairness and neutrality in facilitating public dialogue. The SFU

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<sup>13</sup> David Suzuki Foundation Application to the Law Foundation of BC for a 2015 Initiative Grant, January 15, 2015:  
**Overall Objectives:**

- Enhance public awareness regarding the inadequacy of environmental protection in our current provincial and federal laws, and the silence of Canada's Constitution on the environment and environmental rights
- Enhance public understanding of constitutional protection of the environment and environmental rights as a legal foundation for a sustainable economy and a safe environment for all
- Enhance public understanding of the legal and political processes by which protection of the environment and environmental rights could be added to the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, including the passage of appropriate municipal resolutions and provincial / federal legislation as key steps in that incremental process
- Identify shared values and common concerns; discuss potential strategies and courses of action for addressing such shared values and common concerns; and in so doing
  - Enrich contextual understanding of public, civil and private sector perceptions of challenges and opportunities associated with building movements calling for reform and strengthening of Canada's environmental laws, at municipal, provincial and federal levels
- Encourage and support inclusive, respectful dialogue by diverse gatherings of British Columbians, representing a broad range of economic, environmental and geographic backgrounds and perspectives

<sup>14</sup> I recruited nine senior leaders from the provincial law societies of BC, Ontario and Saskatchewan as BCBDD references.

Centre for Dialogue (SFU) and the University of Victoria Faculty of Law both expressed early interest in convening one or more of the dialogues. We targeted SFU as our first choice, for three main reasons: reputation,<sup>15</sup> resources,<sup>16</sup> and mandate.<sup>17</sup>

On February 19, Alaya Boisvert, DSF Blue Dot Project Lead, and I met with Shauna Sylvester, SFU Centre for Dialogue Executive Director, and Robin Prest, SFU Civic Engage Practice Lead. I expected a straightforward discussion, likely to conclude with SFU's confirmation of its readiness to convene the 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues. The road had been paved by a string of emails (McIntosh/Prest) and a February 10 conference call (Boisvert/McIntosh/Prest), during which we reviewed BCBDD's needs for an independent, neutral and reputable convenor, and SFU's general expectations, needs and options for providing dialogue facilitation and convenor services.

Notwithstanding such expectations and preparations, the February 19 meeting took its own course. Early in the discussion Ms. Sylvester noted SFU's concern with the close connection of the objectives of the proposed public dialogues to the Blue Dot initiative's stated goal to amend the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*:

When seven out of 10 provinces representing more than 50 per cent of the Canadian population have recognized our right to a healthy environment we turn toward the **ultimate goal: amending the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms***.<sup>18</sup> [emphasis added]

Ms. Sylvester confirmed SFU's need to ensure the neutrality of any dialogue it convenes, and expressed the view that, since a key BCBDD strategic purpose is enhance public support for the Blue Dot project's "ultimate goal" of constitutional protection of the environment and environmental rights, the Blue Dot partner organizations will be unlikely to welcome an

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<sup>15</sup> [http://csps-efpc.gc.ca/forlearners/coursesandprograms/programs/publicservant-in-residenceprogram/assignmentopportunities/s\\_fraser-eng.aspx](http://csps-efpc.gc.ca/forlearners/coursesandprograms/programs/publicservant-in-residenceprogram/assignmentopportunities/s_fraser-eng.aspx)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.sfu.ca/dialogue/about-us.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.sfu.ca/dialogue/programs/civic-engage.html> "... to increase the capacity of governments and citizens to work collaboratively on policy decisions ..."

<sup>18</sup> <http://bluedot.ca/the-plan/>

objectively framed and convened public dialogue process—with the potential to elicit options or deliberations incompatible with that goal. I noted our objective to “encourage and support inclusive, respectful dialogue by a diverse group of British Columbians, who represent a broad range of economic, environmental and geographic perspectives”; and emphasized the generative aspect of our proposed framing questions.<sup>19</sup> Ms. Sylvester reiterated her conclusion that the Blue Dot “ultimate goal” of amending the Charter is essentially antithetical to the convening of a neutral dialogue on the subject. She advised that SFU will be unable to convene the 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues, but would welcome opportunities to provide advice and input as the project progresses.

**c. BC Blue Dot Dialogues Preliminary Workshop: Planning the Planning—or Not?**

I hope to use Peter Boothroyd’s Seven-Step Model<sup>20</sup> to guide the crucial “planning the planning” process for establishing BCBDD’s strategic focus and organizational framework. I say “hope to use” rather than “used” because as these words are being written in mid-April, my March 11, 2015 memorandum and its recommendations—including seven-step planning—to Blue Dot Project Lead Alaya Boisvert remain unresolved.<sup>21</sup> Two key issues contribute to the current and continuing delay: the preoccupation of DSF’s management team with their 2016 strategic planning process (and related internal power struggle); and the major effort required of

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<sup>19</sup> DSF Grant Application to LFBC, submitted January 15, 2015, p. 4:

*What is the greatest challenge your community will face in the next 20 years?*

*What is your greatest concern for your children about the world they will face 20 years from now?*

*How might protecting the environment and environmental rights in Canada’s Constitution affect your community’s business performance and employment prospects; health; safety; and general well-being?*

*What can you do to advance the cause of protecting the environment and environmental rights in Canada’s Constitution?*

<sup>20</sup> Boothroyd, Peter. 1991 “Developing Community Planning Skills: Applications of a Seven-Step Model.” *CHS Research Bulletin*, February 1991: 5-6

<sup>21</sup> Bill McIntosh Memorandum to Alaya Boisvert, *2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues / Preliminary Workshop Planning*, March 11, 2015 – includes the following recommendation for dealing with SFU and the BCBDD convenor issue: “... invite [Ms. Sylvester and Mr. Prest] to represent [SFU] in our upcoming BCBDD preliminary workshop; include the “engagement vs. dialogue” issue and the “choice and mandate of convenor” matter in the workshop agenda; frame the session to facilitate deliberative dialogue (i.e. inclusive discussion and decision-making); and set the invitation list to ensure ample diversity in the participants’ perspectives.”

the BCBDD team in recent weeks to address a number of LFBC concerns with DSF's grant application.<sup>22</sup>

It is worthy of reflection that both those issues are aspects of the political process in which this project is set and is intended to influence. To that reflection we now turn.

## 5. "What did I learn, how did I learn it, and why does it matter?"

### a. Political timing drives the dialogue timeline; not vice versa

While a timeline may be a standard planning and management tool, I've learned that timelines provide little, if any, persuasive or predictive value in a complex, political environment. And, attempting to compel adherence to a pre-conceived planning agenda or timeline in such an environment may well be counter-productive.<sup>23</sup> My dealings with DSF CEO Dr. Peter Robinson and Ecojustice Executive Director Devon Page have reminded me of a lesson learned again and again over the years: powerful leaders generally don't respond well to timelines, unless they've set them, or find them useful.

Another learning has been the confirmation of Professor Boothroyd's dictum that the planning of a complex dialogue process is itself a complex, on-going and dialogic process.<sup>24</sup> From the outset, I have underestimated the energy, patience and time this project has demanded and consumed. My relationship with Blue Dot Project Lead Alaya Boisvert has been strengthened—and tested—by my efforts to use timelines and deadlines to advance our project.

My emerging meta-lesson: communication, relationships and political reality all matter more than the calendar. That lesson should help me to find and maintain the delicate balance between discipline, flexibility and patience essential to the successful planning of this and future dialogue

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<sup>22</sup> As the initial grant application process presented a valuable source of incentive, discipline and focus, so to did the Law Foundation's call for improvement of the application: namely stronger constitutional and legal context; and greater clarity regarding the roles of Ecojustice and Bill McIntosh in the development and execution of the project.

<sup>23</sup> Pruitt, B and Thomas, P. 2009 *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners*. Stockholm: International IDEA. 96-97

<sup>24</sup> Boothroyd, Peter. DLOG 703 *Planning for Engagement* Lecture, January 14, 2015



projects; and to maintain healthy respect for the political forces that always constrain and sometimes overwhelm even the best of planning—and planners.

**b. Co-design may be virtuous, but like any virtue, is easier prescribed than practised**

From the beginning, the concept for the BC Blue Dot Dialogues has stressed the virtuous importance of early and ongoing participation in co-design by the project’s partners, sponsors and conveners.<sup>25</sup> Yet, the BCBDD design process has been less about virtue and more about pragmatism—driven by the power of personalities, politics, and the pressure of time. At no point was a conscious decision made to exclude anyone from the process. The current ‘planning of the planning’ memorandum calls for “bringing together a fairly diverse group of about a dozen key people for a day-long deliberation, with the purpose of establishing the strategic focus and planning framework for the 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues.”<sup>26</sup> But, a practical reality is that a good deal of preliminary planning and political navigation has already been done, much of which would have been more contentious and difficult had DSF included a broader mix of participants in that process.

Another and more important political reality: I’ve recently learned that DSF has yet to resolve its internal differences about this dialogue project’s purpose, priority and scope, and may yet decide not to include the 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues in the DSF strategic plan for 2016—notwithstanding the preliminary work done to date (including applying for a \$50,000 grant to fund the project).<sup>27</sup>

My meta-lessons: do all I can to stay abreast of DSF’s evolving strategic priorities and internal politics as they relate to the Blue Dot initiative; strive to align BC Blue Dot

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<sup>25</sup> McIntosh, Bill. 2014 *Blue Dot Dialogues: Building Together on Common Ground* ibid. (Appendix 1) 5-6 “Ideally, the partners, sponsors and conveners of the Blue Dot Dialogues will work together from the outset of the project, “... in a way that builds a sense of ownership among key parties to it, by engaging them in shaping the design process.””

<sup>26</sup> McIntosh, Bill. 2015 *2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues / Preliminary Workshop Planning*. Memorandum to Alaya Boisvert, David Suzuki Foundation, Blue Dot Project Lead. 5

<sup>27</sup> Email from Alaya Boisvert, DSF’s Blue Dot Project Lead, April 10, 2015

Dialogues planning according; and maintain healthy respect for political realities, as already noted.

**c. “Funding” involves more than money, and means more than “means to an end”**

I have learned that project funding involves much more than the money itself, and means much more than means to an end. Access to funders is power, and the availability of funding can have significant impact on strategic priorities, and on the timing of decisions and projects. In this case, I was fortunate to have advance knowledge of the availability of a large grant from the Law Foundation of BC, and even more fortunate to be familiar with the demanding application requirements—particularly the imminent deadline. DSF and EJ almost certainly would not have agreed to undertake the BC Blue Dot Dialogues so quickly—albeit in principle and subject to funding—without the fortuitous combination of four factors: the incentive of that \$50,000 grant, the pressure to define objectives and evaluation metrics imposed by the application requirements; the inflexible application deadline; and my availability to lead the application process.

I have also learned that DSF’s reputation for fiscal strength and efficient fund-raising has raised serious questions within LFBC regarding DSF’s need for a Law Foundation grant to fund the proposed 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues. My efforts to warn my DSF colleagues of the importance of explaining and demonstrating financial need to LFBC—and the explanations that have been provided to LFBC—appear to be having only limited effect.

It seems ironic that DSF’s excellent fiscal history and reputation may be a weakness in this fund-raising effort. My resulting meta-lessons: note that past accomplishment doesn’t guarantee future success; recognize the ever-present dangers of over-confidence and carelessness born of power and past success; recognize the importance of guarding against, and challenging, the assumptions—and vanities—that fuel such over-confidence and carelessness; and remember that it’s always easier to see over-confidence in others than in myself.

**d. Leaders' personalities influence their organizations' collaborative and dialogic processes, but only to a point**

I have learned that while leadership personalities have significant influence on organizational dialogue and should be studied closely, senior leaders—and their personalities—often do not determine the path or outcome of the processes of collaboration and dialogue. Without the early support of Dr. Peter Robinson, CEO of DSF, Devon Page, Executive Director of Ecojustice, and Wayne Robertson, QC, Executive Director of the Law Foundation of BC, the BC Blue Dot Dialogues would not have gotten off the ground. Yet, all three leaders moved to distance themselves from the project once the concept became a working proposal, each citing the importance of “operationalizing.”

I've also learned that this dialogue project's 'anti-polarization' premise presents challenges to both progressive and conservative public advocacy organizations, and especially to their leaders. Leaders cannot risk getting too far ahead of their constituencies on a contentious issue like constitutional protection of the environment – especially regarding a proposal calling for inclusive dialogue and diversity of community representation (i.e. including their organizations' ideological and political adversaries).<sup>28</sup>

My meta-lesson: be aware, be empathetic, and be realistic about the constraints and pressures facing organizational leaders.

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<sup>28</sup> Connor, Roger. 2005 “Strategy and Stance: a Framework for Understanding Public Advocacy.” *Vanderbilt Project on Public Advocacy, Discussion Paper Series No. 110501*, November 2005, at page 11: “Public advocacy is a group sport of constant conversation, much of which is an exercise in solidarity-building that creates and sustains a caricature of competing groups ... Support for the organization's position is a prerequisite for employment, so as an organization or movement grows, the professionals become more and more isolated from any dispassionate assessment of the other's actual motivations.”

e. **The *Generative Dialogue* paradox: generative dialogue’s essential condition is also the reason it cannot be created, only discovered & welcomed**

I have found it instructive to reflect on Adam Kahane’s explanation of four modes of dialogue, and particularly *Generative Dialogue*, with its vital role in successful ‘deep change initiatives’, and in solutions to ‘dynamically, generatively, and socially complex problems’:<sup>29</sup>

I ... can now see as a pattern across all of my experiences of change ... four distinct conversational modes: *Downloading*, *Debating*, *Reflective Dialogue*, and *Generative Dialogue*. If we want to change the world, we have to develop our capacity to recognize and navigate through all four of these modes. I say this because I have observed that the type and quality of the conversations people have is the most important indicator of whether or not their change initiative will be successful.

*Downloading*, by far the most common, maintains the status quo. It maintains the (artificial) wholeness of the system and re-enacts the patterns of the past ... In *Debating*, we see more of what is there, but create nothing new. *Reflective Dialogue* calls on us to be empathetic—to understand how we influence the world around us ... *Generative Dialogue* is the least common and most precious ... mode [because it] allows a group to discover its larger and deeper shared purpose. *Generative Dialogue* is vital for the success of deep change initiatives ...

Ronath Ochaeta, a human rights activist, told the story of a time he had gone to a Mayan village to witness the exhumation of a mass grave (one of many) from a massacre. When the earth had been removed, he noticed a number of small bones, and he asked the forensics team if people had had their bones broken during the massacre. They replied that, no, the grave contained the corpses of pregnant women, and the small bones were of their fetuses. When Ochaeta finished telling his story, the team was completely silent ... for a long time perhaps five minutes ...

**In *Generative Dialogue*, we are fully present to what is emerging in the whole system.** (emphasis added) ... The five minutes that followed Ochaeta’s story was in *Generative Dialogue* ... The normal sense of separation between people seemed lessened; two participants referred to the experience as one of “communion.” ...

In *Reflective Dialogue*, each story is a piece of the puzzle, and empathetic inquiry in a diverse group allows the whole picture to become visible. But in *Generative Dialogue*, each story is a hologram that contains the whole picture. In Ochaeta’s story the team glimpsed the essential whole of the Guatemalan reality: the mystery to which they needed

<sup>29</sup> Kahane, Adam. 2004 *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening and Creating New Realities*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.: San Francisco At p. 31: “A problem has high dynamic complexity if cause and effect are far apart in time and space ... high generative complexity if its future is unfamiliar and unpredictable ... high social complexity if the people involved look at things very differently.” At p. 75: “To solve a complex problem, we have to immerse ourselves in and open up to its full complexity. Dynamic complexity requires us to talk not just with experts close to us, but also with those on the periphery. Generative complexity requires that we talk not only about options that worked in the past, but also about ones that are emerging now. And social complexity requires us to talk not just with people who see things the same way we do, but especially with those who see things differently, even those we don’t like. We must stretch way beyond our comfort zone.”

to be connected, in order to do what they had to do. **In a Generative Dialogue, it is as if meaning emerges not from any one person but from the centre of the circle.**<sup>30</sup>

Kahane's explanation of *Generative Dialogue*—and the vital role this “least common and most precious mode of dialogue” plays in successful deep change initiatives and solutions to complex problems—has helped me to recognize four issues and their implications for the BC Blue Dot Dialogues:

- amending or otherwise altering Canada's Constitution to include protection of the environment and environmental rights
  - constitutes both a ‘dynamically, generatively and socially complex problem’ and a ‘deep change initiative’, likely requiring great breadth and depth of societal support
    - ✓ the coalescing of which likely requires that conventional advocacy and mass-mobilization campaigning be supplemented by *Generative Dialogue*, involving a diverse, inclusive cross-section of British Columbians and Canadians
- a process of “inclusive, respectful dialogue by diverse gatherings of British Columbians, who represent a broad range of economic, environmental and geographic perspectives” ... “enhancing public understanding of constitutional protection of the environment and environmental rights as a legal foundation for a sustainable economy and a safe environment for all”<sup>31</sup> might have the potential to yield *Generative Dialogue*
- an essential condition of *Generative Dialogue* is wide-spread recognition among its participants that deep change of the status quo is necessary, accompanied by their widely-shared conviction that such deep change cannot come from unilateral action by any individual or group, nor from reliance on lessons learned in the past<sup>32</sup>
- that essential condition is also the reason that *Generative Dialogue* cannot be created, only discovered and welcomed if and when it occurs— a generative paradox

<sup>30</sup> Kahane, Adam. 2002 *Changing the World by Changing How We Talk and Listen* Generon. 2-5

<sup>31</sup> 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues Overall Objectives – see footnote 13 on p. 4

<sup>32</sup> Drawn from a lecture given by Adam Kahane at UBC's Sauder School of Business in October 2013. Also from: Kahane, Adam. 2012 *Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future* Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.: San Francisco At p. 91: “We often tell ourselves that we can succeed in transforming the future through forceful action. Increasingly often, however, we cannot. As the world becomes more complex, with more interdependency and more unpredictability and more actors with power and voice, it becomes more difficult to effect transformation unilaterally. We need new stories.

The story of transformative scenario planning is one of collaboration instead of unilateralism. Most of the projects described in this book were motivated by the need for collaboration ... All of the projects employed a process characterized by collaboration that enabled (rather than forced) actors to choose to transform themselves.”

If that generative paradox applies as much to the design and planning of public dialogue as to its conduct (and I can't see any reason why it would not), then an important learning follows. The Blue Dot campaign—and the 2015-16 BC Blue Dot Dialogues—are unlikely to include public dialogues that are meaningfully diverse and inclusive (i.e. including representatives of groups perceived as ideological and political adversaries to the campaign), unless and until the Blue Dot campaign leaders—and the leaders of the Blue Dot partner organizations—come to the realization that their conventional advocacy-and-mobilization approach to civic engagement will be unlikely to generate sufficient *new* public support to achieve the Blue Dot campaign's paramount goal of constitutional change. That is, support drawn from beyond the already ideologically progressive segments and environmentally committed elements of society. And more importantly, the Blue Dot campaign for constitutional protection of the environment and environmental rights won't be ready for diverse, inclusive dialogue, unless and until the Blue Dot campaigners—and their leaders—themselves are ready.

These meta-lessons emerged for me:

- be passionate, in recognizing and celebrating the possibilities for generatively driven progress in using dialogue to support the Blue Dot campaign, and embracing and sharing the opportunities to prepare the conditions for that possibility
- be patient, in maintaining awareness and flexibility in responding to shifting Blue Dot politics, priorities and timelines, and in accepting that the time and circumstances may not yet be ripe for the Blue Dot campaign to 'discover and welcome' *Generative Dialogue*
- be prepared, in being ready to recognize and respond to the opportunities to support *Generative Dialogue*, should they arise in my work on the BC Blue Dot Dialogues, and in being ready to recognize other opportunities to support deep change through *Generative Dialogue*
- be practical, in being flexible in my approach to working on the BC Blue Dot Dialogues, and in being ready to respond to other opportunities to support deep change through *Generative Dialogue*