DIFFICULT DIALOGUES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

RESOURCE GUIDE

DIALOGUE IN A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Area of Conflict
Moving from harm to value

Zone of irrelevance
Difference does not seem to matter and goes largely unnoticed

Zone of value
Difference is relevant, but non-problematic, and even valuable

Zone of challenge
Difference is relevant, but problematic, creating obstacles that require special management

Zone of harm:
Differences are managed in damaging or destructive ways.

Provided by
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Stephen Littlejohn
and the Public Dialogue Consortium

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OVERVIEW

Designed as a practical resource, this manual is divided into four sections that should be helpful in various aspects of the UNO dialogue project. It was written for the faculty and staff training as part of the "Breaking Silence" program.

The first section provides general information about dialogue as a form of communication. Here we emphasize the role of dialogue in the management of difference and how dialogue functions as an alternative to typical forms of interaction in potential conflict situations.

The second section covers design considerations—how to plan for dialogue. This section provides general guidelines for design as well as several formats that can be used.

The third section is a short course on facilitation—practical techniques for leading dialogue sessions with particular emphasis on the role of facilitators in this process.

The fourth section deals with special teaching-related concerns and provides guidance on how to promote and manage good dialogue in the classroom.
DIALOGUE IN A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

About Dialogue

Unlike ordinary conversation or debate, dialogue is a form of communication that helps build capacity in communities to explore hopes and concerns in a way that encourages mutual understanding and respect at times when differences can be difficult and challenging.

Dialogue is not just a set of techniques but a way of being with others. It is based on a commitment to view each person as unique and immeasurable. When engaged in dialogue, participants are open to the mystery of others, are curious about the experiences and thinking that have led to current positions, and come to appreciate the unique life journeys that affect their respective beliefs, attitudes, and experience. Dialogue does not preclude passionate disagreement, but provides opportunities in which differences are sites for exploration and growth.

People who are able to talk and listen together in an environment of trust and respect help make better social worlds; they make better decisions, they make better organizations, and they make better communities.

Many things can happen in the dialogue process. Participants may gain insight into their own experiences and beliefs. They may learn how to say what is important to them in a way that others can hear it and discover new important differences as well as shared concerns. Typically, participants learn important new things and come to realize that issues are more complex than previously thought.

Dialogue sometimes leads to action. While dialogue is a worthy end in itself, participants may be moved to act as a result. Dialogic techniques can be used effectively in support of action planning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>In arguments we . . .</strong></th>
<th><strong>In dialogue we . . .</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Try to win.</td>
<td>Try to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compete for speaking time.</td>
<td>Value listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak for others.</td>
<td>Speak mostly for ourselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring up the behavior of others.</td>
<td>Speak from personal experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a potentially threatening and uncomfortable environment.</td>
<td>Create an atmosphere of safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take sides with others.</td>
<td>Discover differences even among those with whom we agree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarize ourselves from those with whom we disagree.</td>
<td>Discover shared concerns between ourselves and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel unswerving commitment to a point of view.</td>
<td>Discover our uncertainties as well as deeply held beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions to make a point or put the other person down.</td>
<td>Ask questions out of true curiosity and the desire to know more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make predictable statements.</td>
<td>Discover significant new things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make simplistic statements.</td>
<td>Explore the complexity of the issues being discussed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compete.</td>
<td>Collaborate.</td>
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</table>
Living in a World of Difference

Human beings understand their experiences within a context of symbols and meanings created over time through social interaction. Each of us lives within numerous realities formed in communication and reflected in language and other expressive forms. Each person is the unique nexus of the social worlds in which he or she has participated. This idea is illustrated on the back cover of this Guide.

The human condition, then, is characterized by human differences, and quality of life is largely determined by the quality of communication involved in managing the differences that matter the most. Within the life of an individual at any given moment, some differences are irrelevant, some are valuable, some are challenging, and some may be harmful, depending upon how we manage them at the moment.

The goal of dialogue is to communicate in ways that have the potential to move away from harm and toward value, as illustrated on the front cover of this Guide. When faced with challenging differences, especially in conflict situations, we will typically following one of the following patterns of communication: Argument, diatribe, force, negotiation, or dialogue.

**TYPICAL PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Characterized by</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>To influence</td>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Persuasion or resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diatribe</td>
<td>To vent</td>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>Reciprocated diatribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force</td>
<td>To prevail</td>
<td>Violence/hegemony</td>
<td>Repression/resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>To settle</td>
<td>Compromise</td>
<td>Agreement or resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>To transform</td>
<td>Dignity and respect</td>
<td>Second-order change</td>
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**DESIGN TOOLKIT**

When you want to engage a community in dialogue, the first question is how and when to do so. The overall design of processes and events will most likely change depending on the needs of the client or the community. The public can be engaged in public issues in a number of ways, and not all of these involve dialogue.

**Levels of Public Engagement**

Public engagement can assume many forms, but these vary in the extent to which dialogue is used.

**Public Opinion Processes**—Public opinion processes are designed to discover public attitudes.

*Surveys*—Best done by polling experts, this kind of research can be valuable in ascertaining the range of opinion on particular issues.

*Focus groups*—Focus groups are an excellent method for getting depth information about feelings, values, concerns, and ideas. These must be done systematically and with careful observation and record keeping. Although harder to codify than surveys, focus-group responses are usually more thoughtful and complete, and they can provide opportunity for some dialogue.

*Deliberative polling*—This method seeks public opinion, but only after participants have had a chance to participate in a town-hall type meeting on the issue, in which they can learn more about and explore the options with others. It seeks, not an uninformed, individualistic opinion, but an opinion informed by social interaction. As a result, it can involve good dialogue.

**Public Education Processes**—Educational processes aim to build understanding of technical and policy issues among stakeholder groups. They can be helpful, and even necessary, but do little to mine the wisdom that members of the public may have about what is important to them. The public is increasingly skeptical of public education campaigns that are perceived as one-sided. The best educational processes are those created collaboratively.

*Forums and presentations*—These can be helpful in disseminating information, but they can also lead to a lack of trust because, by themselves, do not involve the public in dialogue.

*Interactive websites*—These are a good way of educating the public, but they are limited to those equipped and inclined to participate in online work. The advantage of websites over forums is that they can involve
recorded threaded discussions in which stakeholders can learn from one another.

Study circles—In study circles, stakeholders spend up to several weeks reading material and discussing issues while also sharing concerns and ideas. These afford an excellent opportunity for informed public input and be quite dialogic.

Public Input Processes—Public input is very common in policy development. It is even required in the United States in many areas. Several approaches vary in their levels of dialogue permitted or encouraged.

Public hearings—Probably the worst form of public input, hearings can be polarized and combative. As part of a larger set of processes, however, they at least allow public input, and if the sponsors show that they are taking this input seriously, hearings can help to build trust. Follow-up is essential.

Issue-framing workshops—Especially designed to elicit ownership of an issue, these processes engage stakeholders in collaborative framing. They are useful for grounding issues in terms that stakeholders appreciate and understand, eliciting policy options, and reality testing.

Gaming methodologies—Methods such as Prosperity Games™ and scenario gaming can be used to engage stakeholder teams in a realistic systemic interaction to create and test various futures. This use of gaming methodology employs a stakeholder engagement process occurring in a live, interactive setting. A useful tool for large-scale strategic planning, games provide an exciting and productive step toward a roadmap to the future. Representing a wide range of interests and diversity of views on key issues, players representing numerous stakeholder groups propel their collective intelligence into a working consensus.

Consensus planning workshops—If well designed and facilitated, these meetings provide an excellent collaborative approach to stakeholder involvement and trust building. Unlike public hearings, consensus processes involve stakeholders in the actual planning process. Many creative and effective communication processes can be used in these workshops.

Multi-stakeholder roadmapping—This kind of event involves a multi-stakeholder group of manageable size to work through the ideas produced in other, larger workshops to create a refined action plan.

Formats for E-Democracy—Internet-based processes of collaboration, discussion, and deliberation.
Public Deliberation and Dialogue Processes—Similar to the planning processes described above, these types of events allow participants to discuss policy problems in some detail with particular emphasis on the pros and cons of various options without having to achieve consensus. These processes are most helpful where there is a diversity of perspectives on an issue and where participants will probably not be able to reach consensus. Public deliberation and dialogue processes build mutual understanding—if not agreement—and are especially helpful to policymakers, who can listen for shared and separate values, creative ideas, deep concerns, and public judgments of policy options.

Citizen conferences—This is an expanded focus-group format in which a diverse group of citizens, carefully selected to represent stakeholders, conduct a Q&A of experts to learn more about an issue. Participants then deliberate about specific policy options, discussing the pros and cons of each option. The group gives a report to policymakers.

Deliberation forums—Unlike a pro-con debate, participants at a deliberation forum systematically address a set of policy options on an issue, openly exploring the gains and losses of each option along with its underlying values. Policymakers listen and learn from the public wisdom expressed.

Study circles—In addition to allowing groups to explore an issue over time, they may also deliberate over an extended period on policy options.

Dialogue groups—Dialogue groups are especially helpful in situations where stakeholders are in conflict with one another over an issue. Here they can explore their differences and common ground in a safe, productive setting. Dialogue groups are especially helpful to build respect and trust prior to participating in actual planning or deliberation processes.

Planning Dialogues

Public dialogue can be done in one or more “events,” or planned activities that may last from a few hours to several days. Design is always important and can be both enlightening and engaging. Process design addresses these questions:

1. What do we hope to accomplish by having a dialogue?
2. What kind of dialogue would work best for us?
3. Who should be involved in this dialogue?
4. How should the dialogue be conducted?

Process planning should aim to achieve three goals:

1. Preventing destructive communication: Preventive processes are actions that minimize the possibility of destructive communication. Fully informed and voluntary participation in a dialogue process is helpful. Preventive
approaches are used during dialogue sessions, as well as before them. For example, confrontative arrangements such as dividing chairs into two opposing sides are avoided. In all cases, agreement to participate is based on an understanding of the nature of the event, the kind of ground rules or guidelines that will be proposed, and a willingness to participate.

2. **Encouraging constructive communication:** Once the discussion is underway, several processes help to promote good dialogue. Facilitators help the group design and guide its own process. They enforce the ground rules to maintain a safe, respectful environment. They intervene as necessary to make sure that everyone has a chance to say what they want to say, to keep the group on track, and to sort out possible misunderstandings. They ask questions that create openings for new kinds of interaction.

3. **Building collaboration:** Good dialogue always includes a collaborative element. Participants are viewed as collaborators in a joint effort to create a constructive conversation. In addition, they provide feedback that can guide future improvement.

Following are a few criteria that can be used in addressing these goals:

1. **Transparency**—Clear, open, and respectful communication.
2. **Inclusion**—Multi-stakeholder engagement.
3. **Inquiry**—Joint discovery and invention instead of pre-determined answers.
4. **Curiosity**—Thinking provisionally, experimenting with ideas, and promoting creativity.
5. **Transcendence**—Being open to new possibilities, surpassing polarities.
6. **Force for the future thinking**—The highest level of planning in which stakeholder ideas and interests combine synergistically to create a wholly new and unanticipated future that benefits everyone.

Several factors may need to be addressed in designing dialogue processes:

1. **Constraints and criteria**—What factors do we need to take into account in order to make good decisions about participants and processes?
2. **Framing the issues**—What do we want participants to address and how shall we state or present these issues to them?
3. **Mapping the stakeholder system**—Who are the players on these issues, what are the affinity groups, and how do they connect with one another?
4. **Expected outcomes**—What do we want to result from the processes of engagement we design?
5. **Participation**—Who should participate in these processes, and how do we recruit them?
6. **Participant roles**—What roles will participants take? What will be the role of agency representatives, technical experts, stakeholder representatives, others?
7. Methods—What methods and formats should be employed in public engagement?
8. Information base—What information should be provided to the participants, and how will this be established and presented?
9. Sponsorship and funding—Who will sponsor this engagement process and how will it be funded?
10. Personnel and logistics—Where and when will the events take place, and how should they be staffed?
11. Results, next steps, and continuation—What will happen after the events, and how will these lead to subsequent events?

Planning is often conducted by a design team, ideally consisting of stakeholder representatives. The Table on the next page outlines several practical design guidelines.\(^4\)
### Design Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Create the right conditions</th>
<th>Manage safety</th>
<th>Pay attention to process</th>
<th>Anticipate second-order outcomes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Don’t wait until conflict breaks out. Engage stakeholders in conversations early on.</td>
<td>1. Think consciously about time and place. 2. Provide appropriate structure. 3. Solicit agreements on process. 4. Promote good facework. 5. Respond to willingness and felt need. 6. Find a shared level of comfort. 7. Leave an out. 8. Use an impartial facilitator.</td>
<td>1. Take time to explore. 2. Build listening into the process. 3. Listen deeply to lived experience, stories told, values, shared concerns, and differences. 4. Ask good questions designed to open the conversation, not close it down. 5. Frame issues carefully to capture a context that will create a joining place. 6. Be appreciative. Look for positive resources, and look for the vision behind negative comments. 7. When speaking, aim to be understood rather than to prevail in a contest. 8. Base positions in personal experience, and help others to understand your life’s experiences. 9. Maintain a multi-valued rather than bi-polar purview. Listen for all the voices.</td>
<td>1. Build respect by looking for the ways in which others are experienced, complex, concerned, intelligent, healthy, and rational. 2. Learn about complexity and develop a healthy suspicion of a two-valued framing of any issue. 3. Build a context for collaboration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. If open conflict has already happened, look for the right moment, often when participants are tired of fighting or become desperate for new solutions.</td>
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<td>3. Work initially in small, private groups.</td>
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<td>4. Be careful about the role of “leaders” and other powerful persons. Allow all of the voices to be heard from the start.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Build on prior success. Avoid single-shot interventions, and use a grow-as-it-goes process.</td>
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<td>6. Be creative about process. Think about what will work best now under the conditions currently experienced.</td>
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Dialogue Formats

Many good dialogue formats are available. Most of the time, you will need to be creative in mixing, matching, and designing new formats that work for your own purposes.

Here are three sample models:

**Public Conversations Model:** This model consists of a series of private dialogues to explore personal feelings, ideas, and perspectives on a controversial issue. Representatives with opposing points of view are included, and the session is highly structured and facilitated to ensure a safe environment and prevent destructive debate.

Although the Public Conversations Project works in a variety of ways, they do use a strong set of principles, outlined in the chart on the following page. The PCP is known for using (1) the go-round method in which everyone has a chance to check in on a question without worrying about others piping in or interrogating them; (2) carefully crafted questions; (3) strong facilitation; and (4) clear ground rules.

**Study Circles Model:** In a series of meetings, participants deliberate about an already-framed issue. Sessions follow a standard format. Educational materials are distributed in advance, and the discussions focus on policy options and community action. Leaders in this model are the National Issues Forums and the Study Circle Resource Center.

Participants in study circles usually meet four or more times and make use of a carefully researched booklet and other materials such as videos to provide balanced information on several sides of an issue. Discussions are systematic and concentrate on particular aspects of an issue in a highly organized fashion.

**Vision-to-Action Model:** Vision to action workshops offer a flexible approach for communities in large and small group formats to explore concerns, visions, and actions. Accomplished in a single- or multiple-session design, these events invite participants to move from a discussion of concerns to visions and then to create action plans.

Many formats for this kind of dialogue are available. The Public Dialogue Consortium uses the C-V-A method, which is a clear and teachable tool for helping facilitators and participants connect concerns, visions, and actions.

The tables on the following pages provide some guidelines for these approaches.
PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS MODEL

Characterized by:
- Creation of a safe, private, confidential environment.
- Exploration of sometimes-intense personal feelings about the topic.
- Goal of changing the pattern of interaction from debate to mutual exploration and understanding.
- Focus on the personal experience and stories of the participants.

Most helpful when:
- Feelings are running high.
- The topic is hot.
- Opinions are clashing.
- New patterns of communication are needed.
- People do not feel safe about opening up.

Less useful when:
- Conflict is low.
- Open congregational involvement is needed.
- Studying information about the issue is required.
- Decision-making or action is the desired outcome.

How to facilitate:
- Provide complete orientation to the process, and establish process agreements at the beginning.
- Guide the process, but allow each person's statements to stand on their own.
- Enforce the guidelines firmly but respectfully.
- Stay out of the discussion.

- Have the dialogue in a private, comfortable space.
- Use strong guidelines that prevent debate and personal attack, encourage listening, and create a feeling of safety and respect.
- Develop a process that is systematic, that allows everyone an opportunity to speak, and that encourages people to listen rather than rehearse their responses.
- Allow sufficient time for everyone's perspective to be expressed and explored.
- Structure the discussion so that people speak only for themselves.
- Encourage curiosity about the experience and ideas of others.
- Allow time to debrief the experience and explore what was learned.

How to use:
- Select participants who represent differing perspectives or opinions on a hot topic.
- Invite them into a new kind of conversation.
- Provide complete orientation to the participants in advance so that they will know what to expect.
STUDY-CIRCLES MODEL

Characterized by:
- Mutual desire to learn more about the issue.
- Deliberating on the pros and cons of alternatives.
- Exploring the values of opposing points of view.
- Relating the issue to personal life.
- Multiple sessions and depth discussion.

Most helpful when:
- Participants have diverse points of view.
- There is a desire to learn more about the issue.
- Actions or decisions will be required.
- Recommendations are wanted.
- Decision makers are willing to participant and listen.
- The dialogue is part of a larger education program.

Less useful when:
- Planning time is insufficient.
- The budget is too low to permit research and preparation.
- The topic is too hot to discuss constructively, or there is too much animosity for people to be open minded.
- People are not willing to commit the time and effort to attend several sessions.

How to use:
- Carefully select and frame an issue, and divide it up into a logical sequence of discussion topics. It is best to use a committee or focus groups to help frame the issue and organize the agenda.
- Research the topic and prepare study-circle materials. Packaged materials on many topics are available through the National Issues Forums and the Study Circles Resource Center.

- Decide how often to meet—one full day, once a week for a month, once a month for four months, or some other interval that will work for the group.
- Decide how many groups to organize based on the number of participants. Set up several groups if many people wish to participate.
- Have a trained facilitator.

How to facilitate:
- After recruiting participants, send out study materials in advance.
- Carefully set up the space. Be sure to have a flip chart, markers, and space for hanging flip-chart pages.
- Acknowledge everyone's comments, but keep the conversation on the topic and guide the process so that the discussion is organized.
- Remind the participants of the guidelines as necessary.
- Remind the group of what they have covered, and provide summaries of main points as necessary.
- Record main ideas, concerns, themes, questions, or suggestions on flip charts as appropriate.
- Remind people of upcoming sessions, and make reminder calls as needed.
- Periodically harvest the discussion. Discuss what has been learned or gained.
VISION-TO-ACTION MODEL

Characterized by:
- Creative techniques that help a group identify its values and imagine a possible future.
- Practical-action thinking.
- Collaboration.
- Movement and physical activity.
- Lots of cross-fertilization.

Most helpful when:
- A great deal of shared, but undefined concern about an issue exists.
- Current conditions are discouraging.
- There is an itch to act.
- The group is creative and idea-oriented.
- The group is visionary.
- There is a desire for a high-engagement event.
- Sponsors desire for buy-in and involvement.

Less useful when:
- The options are already well defined.
- Participants do not feel empowered to do anything, or they perceive that the real decision makers will not take them seriously.
- People do not feel safe exploring the issue in public.

How to facilitate:
- Because this process is often done in a large-group setting, several facilitators may be needed. Consider using one or two main facilitators and facilitation helpers or “table” facilitators.
- Have plenty of butcher paper, flip charts, and markers.
- It is often helpful to assign recorders to the various tables.
- Work back and forth between small groups and large groups. Have small groups periodically report out the results of their respective conversations.
- Structure the session so that each part builds on what was done earlier.
- Be flexible, and be prepared to modify the format as needed.

How to use:
- Set up a creative design team.
- Attract broad-based participation representing differing stakeholder interests, and the desire for building a sense of community.
- Recruit a trusted member of the community, perhaps a leader, to “sponsor” the process and provide legitimacy.
- Establish a format. Do you want to have a day-long workshop, a two-day workshop, a series of smaller sessions?
- Provide orientation in advance. Make sure everyone understands the purpose and process.
- Provide process tools. “Teach” participants how to have a dialogue, how to produce a common vision and create action plans.
- Keep things moving. Mix up the participants so that there is plenty of cross-fertilization.
- Build consensus on a vision, and then move to action plans.
The SHEDD Process

SHEDD is a generalized design model that guides participants in how to think about planning for dialogue. It is intended to create places for all stakeholders to be involved in dialogue about the formation, discussion, and decision of issues. The stages are outlined as follows:

S: Getting Started
H: Hearing all the voices
E: Enriching the conversation
D: Deliberating the options
D: Deciding and moving forward together

Normally, SHEDD is a step-wise model designed to guide planning the stages of an event or process. In stage 1, we begin by setting the context and establishing a safe environment. In stage 2, we open up conversation in ways that empower everyone to express and hear what they consider most important. In stage 3, various techniques are used to explore issues further and to deepen the dialogue. Some processes end with this exploration; others move on to action. If the group wants to address policy or action possibilities, stage 4 enables them to identify and deliberate on alternatives, and in stage 5 they make commitments about how to proceed.

Issue Framing

The quality of discussion depends in large measure on how the issue is framed. Issue framing sets the context for dialogue. If people are stuck and cannot constructively talk about an issue in one context, the key may be to shift contexts by re-framing the issue.
Well framed issues possess three characteristics:

- They are open-ended questions permitting a variety of responses.
- They do not force either-or choices.
- They are sufficiently broad to give participants wide latitude of discussion, but sufficiently focused to permit constructive conversation.
- They are framed in ways that permit self-learning, exploration of complexity, and collaborative relationship building.

Some issues are undiscussable because they are framed in unsafe ways. The issue as stated invites polarized and potentially dangerous face-threatening responses. To make such issues discussable:

- Reframe from closed to open
  From "Who should lead our nation, Republicans or Democrats?" to "What political directions should our nation take?"

- From leading to inclusive
  From "How can our nation return to its Christian roots?" to "How can our nation build on its religious foundations?"

- Reframe from negative to positive
  From "How can crime and violence be solved?" to "How can we build a safe community?"

- Reframe from problem to vision
  From "What can be done about racism?" to "How can our community build positive intercultural relationships?"

- Reframe from positions to values
  From "What kind of project do you want to do in this class?" to "What interests, goals, and styles of learning should be incorporated into our class project?"

In framing an issue, think about the desired focus of the discussion:

- To focus on identity, ask about participants to explore who they are as individuals and as a group.
- To focus on principles, ask them what they stand for—their values.
- To focus on intentions, ask where they are going, what they want to see happen, and what the whole group thinks it can accomplish together.
- To focus on assumptions, ask the group what they are not thinking about and what their logic is.
- To focus on possibilities, ask about what kinds of futures they could make together.5
FACILITATION TOOLKIT

What is Facilitation?

Facilitators help groups free themselves from internal and external obstacles or difficulties so that participants can more efficiently and effectively pursue the achievement of the session’s desired outcomes. Facilitators clarify communication, prevent miscommunication, and manage conflict. As a process manager, the facilitator is more concerned with process and communication than with content.

To keep a group focused and directed on a task, a facilitator can rely on tools such as ground rules, a clear agenda, and a safe environment.

Ground rules can be set by a design committee, the facilitator, or the group itself. The most effective ground rules usually focus on common courtesy and civility, such as “one person speaks at a time, no personal attacks, and keep comments concise and brief.”

Facilitators must ensure that there is a clear agenda. A clear agenda creates a common set of assumptions for all participants involved. Remember that group members come together with different sets of perceptions, ideas, beliefs, and values. It is important for a facilitator to display, discuss, and refer to the agenda. Most sessions have an agenda for the day and a smaller “mini-agenda” for the session at hand.

A safe environment allows participants a place to freely share points of view, negotiate issues, and discuss options. Facilitators acknowledge the voices of participants and serve to direct and redirect comments in the appropriate direction. People want to be heard and recognized. By having their opinions valued and respected, group members feel safe to explore options other than their fast-held positions and work to create mutual understanding.

Principles of Facilitation

There are many styles, models, and methods for facilitation, but these share five things:

1. Manage the process, not the content.
2. Remain impartial.
3. Help the group see itself.
4. Provide organization and structure.
5. Encourage commitment.

Basic Facilitation Tasks

Before the meeting:

1. Define your role and begin to build trust.
2. Gather information:
   - Group goals
   - Membership information
   - Organizational structure
   - Special problems and concerns
   - Physical space
3. Work with client to design process.
4. Establish a comfortable physical space.

During the meeting:

1. Clarify goals.
2. Establish roles and rules.
3. Verify and refine agenda.
4. Stay in touch with group’s process needs.
5. Provide direction and organization as needed.

After the meeting:

1. Follow up as necessary.
2. Help provide a transition to the next meeting.
3. Prepare a report if required.

Time Management

How can you keep people on track, help them share speaking time, make sure the group gets the job done, and finish on time?

- Generate an agenda and remind people of what they have covered and what is left to do.
- Give regular time reminders.
- Remind the group to keep comments brief.
- If participants seem to be getting off track, ask them if that is how they want to use their limited time.
- If you have to cut someone off, do it in a nice way. Acknowledge contributions before cutting someone off.

Acknowledging

One of the most common practices of facilitators is to acknowledge. You acknowledge in order to help the group see itself—its situation, its process, its constraints, its resources, and its behavior.

Acknowledge what you see whenever doing so would help the group work more constructively together.
What can you acknowledge?

- Constraints, problems, difficulties.
- Interests, values, goals.
- Differences and issues.
- Hard work and positive contributions.
- Positive, respectful interaction.
- Recognition of others.
- Forward movement.
- Shared concerns and common ground
- Consensus and agreement

**Summarizing**

Summarizing is one of the most useful things a facilitator can do. Summarizing can help the group see its progress, identify shared concerns, define issues, and stay on track. The key is to know **when** and **what** to summarize:

- Summarize after important information has been shared.
- Summarize when focus is desired.
- Summarize when a transition is needed.
- Summarize when thought time is needed.
- Summarize as a polite way to interrupt.
- Summarize when a shared concern or common ground seems to be emerging.
- Summarize when the group needs to get clarity on its issues.
- Summarize after various interests have been expressed.
- Summarize after one or more proposals have been made.
- Summarize at natural breaking points.

**Restating**

Restate what people say when you want group members to hear one another and feel understood. You can also restate as a way of checking your own understanding.

You can restate . . .

- Main points.
- Significant detail.
- Information that may not be well understood.
- Points that seem very important to the speaker.

Restate when . . .

- Members of the group seem distracted.
- The speaker seems confused or unclear.
• Key values or interests are being expressed.
• Requests, demands, or proposals are put forward.
• Participants acknowledge one another.

**Reflecting Feelings**

Often emotion is an important part of what is being expressed. Sometimes the feeling is more important than the content. Reflect feelings to help check understanding, help participants feel confirmed and acknowledged, and help the group members understand the emotional dimension of what others are saying.

You can reflect feelings when you sense that the speaker really wants the emotion to be acknowledged. You can reflect feelings that seem especially pertinent to the participant’s position, interests, values, or perspective. You can also reflect feelings that are not being heard or sensed by others.

Be careful in reflecting feelings:

• Keep it safe.
• Avoid embarrassment.
• Don’t reflect the obvious.
• Select the terms you use carefully.

**Framing**

Framing is giving the participants a constructive context for understanding what they are hearing, saying, and doing. Good framing can help soften and neutralize hostile comments, save face, encourage forward movement, clarify, and introduce fresh perspectives and creative thinking.

Some possibilities:

• Complaints about the past can be framed as hopes for the future.
  Participant: *I’ve been kicked around all my life!*
  Facilitator: *You want to be treated respectfully like everyone else.*

• Negative statements can be framed as positive desires.
  Participant: *No one cares about students at this school.*
  Facilitator: *For you, then, student interests are vital and students matter.*

• Personal attacks can be framed as issues.
  Participant: *You’re a racist!*
  Facilitator: *It looks like we need to talk about racial relations on campus, right?*

• Individual concerns can be framed as community interests.
  Participant: *As a disabled person, I’m left out.*
Facilitator: You want everyone to have access and full inclusion, is that right?

• Concerns can be framed as visions.
  Participant: Americans are so ignorant of non-Western cultures.
  Facilitator: You would like the educational system to build greater multi-cultural knowledge?

Managing Difficult Behavior

Here are some strategies for helping to transform negative behavior into a more positive pattern:

**Interruptions:** Acknowledge the person's need to talk.
  I can see you have strong feelings on this, Bob, and we'll get to you in just a moment. In the meantime, I want to hear the rest of Jane's comment.

**Non-participation:** Acknowledge listening and invite comment.
  Jim, I see you have been listening for a while, and I wonder what you are thinking about all of this.

**Disruptive behavior:** Address it as a group problem.
  I notice we’ve been losing time by repeating things after people arrive. I wonder how we can make more efficient use of our time in this regard.

**Side Conversations:** Talk to the offending individuals privately.
  Betty, I’ve been distracted by your whispering in the back row. I’m sure it’s nothing, but I just wanted to check with you to see if there is something I should know.

**Offensive statements:** Make use of ground rules.
  (A group member makes a racial slur. Pause for a moment to let it sink in, see if anyone comments, then remind the group of the need for respectful interaction. Acknowledge the offender’s strong feelings without condoning his or her language.)

**Hostility toward others:** Reframe it and remind the group of the ground rules.
  [upon hearing one participant call another a thief] I want to remind you about the ground rule of maintaining respectful language. We have to work together, so let’s make it as easy as possible.

**Loud, emotional argument:** Interrupt, acknowledge, summarize, and take a break.
  Just a minute, just a minute. Excuse me. I can see that Tom is very upset about Elizabeth’s point, and Elizabeth you don't appreciate Tom’s argument about it. I can see that both of you care about this issue, and I want to suggest that we look at it as calmly as possible. Let’s take a break and get back to this point when we get back.

**Gripping and whining:** Acknowledge the caring, state the positive vision behind the person’s complaint, and ask for a solution.
  I see you really care about making improvements here. I appreciate your vision for a really effective working environment, and I’m wondering what ideas you have for improving the situation.

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Flipcharts

Facilitators often need to keep track of a group’s comments and ideas in a way that will be helpful to members as they work. The flipchart is commonly used for this purpose. You can tear off the sheets and hang them on the wall for constant reference.

Here are some guidelines:

- Find the best place to set the flipchart so everyone can see it.
- Use several flipcharts as needed.
- Don’t spend the whole time with your back to the group.
- Write in key words that capture the thought.
- Write clearly and organize the material on the chart in a logical way that is easy to read.
- Feel free to use a creative format as long as the group can easily follow what you are doing.
- Use different colors if you have them.
- Don’t write too large or too small.
- Have fun with your flip charts!

Digital cameras provide a flipchart enhancement that can be very effective. Your flipcharts can be photographed and either emailed to participants or printed and distributed to them. Photos can also be kept as a record for future reference.

Cultural Issues

As a system of beliefs, values, and practices common to a large group of people, culture involves learned patterns that are perpetuated over time. There are many types of culture: Ethnic, gender, national, language-using groups, regional groups, organizations, etc. Although no one is a member of just one culture, a certain culture may come to have special significance in a person’s life or may emerge as significant within a particular situation.

How we communicate is determined in part by cultural patterns. For example:

- Some cultures value verbal communication, and others place more value on nonverbal forms.
- Some cultures are more formal, and others informal.
- Some cultures speak directly to the point, and others tend to be indirect.
- Some cultures feel the need to fill moments with talk, while others value silence.
- Some cultures prefer calmness, while others show they care by emotional and loud expression.
How we define and manage conflict is also determined in part by cultural patterns. Here are a few cultural differences in how conflict is handled:

- Some people value confrontation; others value harmony.
- Some defer to individuals with power and authority, while others prefer collaboration.
- In some cultures, intermediaries are frequently used; in others direct communication is preferred.
- Some cultures use individual negotiation, when other cultures emphasize group consensus.
- Many groups want direct discussion, while others want to keep it indirect.

How, then, do we manage cultural differences? Facilitators cannot learn every culture and adapt to every cultural form. Being overly "cultural" can lead to stereotyping and inappropriate behavior. In general, dialogue is a **third culture** that will have some aspects that each person will find comfortable and some he or she will find uncomfortable. Acknowledge this, and ask participants to engage a "new kind of conversation." In addition:

- Expect differences.
- Do not assume understanding.
- Listen carefully.
- Seek ways of having parties reflect one another's understandings.
- Be patient, humble, and willing to learn.
- Ask what participants need.
- Look for ways of meeting parties' deep cultural interests.
- Be flexible.
**TEACHING TOOLKIT**

**Dialogue in the Classroom**

Dialogue may be used as an ongoing process in the classroom by integrating it into a variety of activities and into a teaching style, or it may be used for specific occasions such as devoting a class period to a structured dialogue on a difficult issue or teaching students about the process of dialogue. In either case, the basic principles of dialogue and facilitation and the design guidelines already described in this manual apply to the classroom as well as the community.

The commitment to find ways of understanding and being understood shapes the language used in dialogue so that people express respect, trust, openness to new ideas and perspectives and acknowledge perspectives other than their own. Typical communication patterns in dialogic interaction include:

- **Active listening:** Not interrupting while another is speaking and paraphrasing or summarizing as a way of helping others feel understood: "Do I understand you correctly as saying...?"

- **Non-evaluative descriptions and disclosures:** "I really felt uncomfortable when you were telling those ethnic jokes."

- **Qualifying statements:** "I understand that this seems a reasonable position from your perspective, but I hope you will understand why it seems unreasonable from my point of view."

- **Expressions of genuine curiosity:** "I really am interested in knowing what brought you to that opinion."

- **Supportive remarks:** "I really appreciate the courage it took for you to explain yourself so candidly."

- **Questions of curiosity:** "I want to learn more about what it was like to be one of the only Black students in your school. Could you tell us more about that?"

**Teacher as Facilitator**

When facilitating dialogues on emotionally charged topics, you'll encounter students who are committed to and very passionate about their perspectives. Two of the most challenging aspects of facilitating such dialogues are to invite every person in the room to take the perspective of wonder and curiosity throughout the conversation and for you as a facilitator to model openness, curiosity, and the "not knowing" position despite your own thoughts and feeling on the subject.
Here are a few guidelines:

- Frame questions and issues carefully.
- Stay neutral with respect to the topic, and display openness to all perspectives, giving all students equal opportunity to speak.
- Take the not-knowing position with regard to the issue and each person’s viewpoint, even if you have detailed knowledge about the topic.
- Clarify assumptions to make sure that all students understand what the speaker means. Some students may hear something that the speaker didn’t say or intend, especially when the topic is controversial.
- Help students get beyond their own position by inviting them to construct a “multiverse” of ideas. Ask them to imagine future possibilities, to imagine what other people not in the room might say, to imagine experiences that might lead them to very different perspective, etc. This increases the ability of students to think about a variety of viewpoints.

Some professors find it difficult to make the move from being expert to being facilitator, but it is possible to take both roles. At certain times you are providing expert information about the topic, while at other times, you open discussion and assume a facilitative role on issues where answers are not clear or on which stakeholders would disagree. Being a facilitator can be a vital and power instructional role. As facilitator, you can . . .

- Frame issues carefully;
- Model good process;
- Give students voice;
- Teach the values of good listening and respectful communication;
- Build skills of collaboration and problem solving;
- Help students open up on issues and questions they might not feel ready to explore;
- Teach new formats and models students themselves can use in professional settings

**Concerns about Dialogue and “Difficult Topics”**

Students often have valid concerns about using dialogue in the class including:

- *Emotional fears and saving face:* “I will offend someone or be hurt by someone’s comments. I may become very angry, sad or frustrated, if I talk candidly about this issue and I don’t want to emotionally expose myself to my classmates. I hate conflict and don’t feel ready to deal with this difficult topic. This may be too touchy-feely.”
• **Competency concerns**: "I haven't done this before, how will I be judged by my classmates? How will I be graded by the professor? How can I prepare for a dialogue session? I'm somewhat shy and am concerned that the 'talkers' will dominate discussion although I have strong feelings on the topic."

• **Outcome concerns**: "I'm sick of talking about this issue—all talk and no action or change. If I truly express my opinion on this issue, I may be kicked out of class. What will I get out of this dialogue—I didn't take this class to talk but to get the information and the grade. The last time there was a class discussion on this topic, things got worse, not better."

Teachers' concerns may include:

• **Planning and facilitating the dialogue process**: How to choose a topic; how to handle emotional outbursts or meltdowns; how to create a safe and inclusive environment where all students feel comfortable speaking; how to change the process if the dialogue doesn't seem to be engaging students; how to prevent discussion from leading to a hardening of positions; and how to keep dialogue from being too safe or from turning into a therapy session.

• **Professional competency and outcomes**: Risking bad evaluations from students for taking them out of their comfort zone; developing a greater comfort level or skill level with using dialogue; students perceiving an underlying agenda when promoting dialogue in the classroom; and getting support for using dialogue in class.

**Teaching Guidelines**

1. **Explain the dialogue process** and how it will be used at the beginning of the course or of a particular class session. (You may want to include this in your syllabus.) Explain the purposes and benefits of using dialogue, and what your expectations are for student involvement. For example, will students help to select topics, design formats, and learn facilitation skills in order to lead a small group in class?

2. **Teach skills for dialogue** to students, planning some class time for practicing active listening, summarizing, appreciative questioning and other facilitation skills if students will be facilitating small groups. Teach students how to be facilitators and give them opportunities to facilitate dialogues in the classroom.

3. **Create a safe environment** by establishing ground rules for dialogue and modeling dialogic interactions with your students. Involve the students in designing, planning, or selecting a dialogue format so they have more ownership of the process.

4. **Manage space** by using tables, rounds, and flexible furniture if possible.
5. **Make use of small groups**, including dyads, when introducing a difficult topic. Move freely back and forth between small and large groups, and make sure that groups are given a deliverable to report out.

6. **Employ a variety of interactive methods** such as interviews and role plays.

7. **Consider the timing** of introducing controversial topics in class. Maximize student interactions that allow them to get to know each other and develop trust before introducing difficult topics. Avoid catching students off-guard, and prepare them ahead of time for what, when, and how a dialogue will take place. Allow enough class time for the dialogue and, if class ends before the process is completed, commit time in your next class for finishing it.

8. **Facilitate slowly** so that students have time to consider ideas that come up in discussion. A few ways to keep the conversation from moving too fast are:
   - Pause for a few seconds after asking a question: when a student answers, help clarify his or her response before moving on.
   - Take time to frame questions carefully or rephrase one that does not seem to be clear.
   - Make use of idea writing, in which students take a few minutes to clarify their thoughts in writing before speaking.
   - Take notes on the board or a flipchart to help slow the pace of the dialogue.

9. **Give everyone a chance to contribute**. If this is not built into a structured dialogue, make several invitations to all participants. Do not let an articulate few dominate the dialogue. Make it a point to address question to those who speak rarely or not at all. Have students work in small groups to increase comfort levels with speaking up. Make use of go-rounds, in which each person is invited to speak in a round.

10. **Make use of collaborative methods** such as wall murals, clustering, and dot voting.

11. **Be flexible**. Be open to changes in the direction of the dialogue if appropriate. For example, “I see we are now discussing x and have wandered away from y. Is that OK with all of you?”

12. **Be aware of invisible social identities**. Some students may not want to reveal their group affiliations—religion, sexual orientation, social class, ethnicity, or disability status—for safety or personal reasons. Dialogue formats should be designed to allow students to “pass” on questions or exercises that may force them to reveal affiliations they don’t wish to disclose.
Effective Classroom Formats

Creativity is the key in designing classroom dialogues. Study circles are an especially effective way to structure discussion about particular content issues. The C-V-A model can be pulled out spontaneously and used at almost any point in a class discussion.

In addition, you might consider using e-dialogues in which students participate in online discussions between class sessions using tools like WebCT and Blackboard.

Using dialogue effectively in the classroom can be a tremendous learning experience for teachers and students. One teacher described her experience using the Public Conversations Project (PCP) dialogue model to talk about race in her interpersonal communications class saying:

"The students remarked that they really enjoyed the experience and that they were surprised at how different their discussion was compared to 'regular' discussion. Many of them admitted that they were both uncomfortable with their restrictions and inspired by the different way of thinking/acting they invoked. They were frustrated at not being able to speak, interrupt, follow up to other comments, but also very aware of how these restrictions pushed them to really listen to others and think about others' comments and their own thoughts before rushing to speak. They seemed to feel empowered by what they saw was possible, in terms of different ways of discussing difficult topics, in terms of coming to terms with how complicated some issues are, and in terms of allowing for conversations and issues to not be resolved."
Websites:

**The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)**
www.thataway.org  This site describes a wide variety of dialogue models, techniques and organizations. It also has a handy quick reference glossary as well as tools for teachers and trainers.

**Public Conversations Project (PCP)**
www.publicconversations.org. You can download a complete script on how to organize and facilitate a Public Conversation. There are also numerous "Dialogue Stories" listed by people who have used this model in a variety of settings and on different topics.

**National Issues Forum (NIF)**
www.nifi.org  This organization is dedicated to promoted nonpartisan public deliberation in communities across the country. The website describes their method of deliberation and how to organize a local forum as well as offering a wide selection of predetermined topics to choose from. Their motto is “Think. Deliberate. Act.”

**Duke University’s DORRs Program**
www.duke.edu/web/racelations/dorr/  This website describes a successful, student-run dialogue program. DORRs: Dialogues on Race Relations brings together existing campus groups that do not normally interact for sustained dialogue on race relations and other major issues facing their membership. Each DORR is led by a trained student facilitator, follows a similar format, and lasts about 90 minutes.

**Public Dialogue Consortium**
www.publicdialogue.org  This is the website of the organization providing the UNO dialogue training. It addresses a way of working with communities, sample projects, and bios of PDC consultants.

**Intergroup Relations Center at Arizona State University, Classroom Resources**
www.asu.edu/provost/intergroup/resources/classguidelines.html. Here you can find practical guidelines for teaching and conducting dialogue in the classroom.
Books:


Articles and Chapters:


(Note: See full citations in Resources section.)

Notes

1 Adapted from the Public Conversations Project
3 Much of this section adapted from Domenici Littlejohn, Inc., The Nuclear Puzzle: Public Engagement Initiative Process Guide (Domenici Littlejohn, 2005).
4 Adapted from Littlejohn, “Moral Conflict,” in The Sage Handbook of Conflict Communication: Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice
5 Based on Mary Alice Speke Ferdig, “Exploring the Social Construction of Complex Self-Organizing Change” (doctoral dissertation at Benedictine University, 2001).
6 From the website of the Public Conversations Project (www.publicconversations.org).