

Introduction

This booklet follows a highly successful conference called “Why Dialogue? (and when and how and where?)” sponsored by the Network for Peace through Dialogue. After the event, one of the organizers, a man professionally engaged in facilitating dialogue, wistfully reflected that while the conference was a great one-time experience, he would appreciate on-going meetings with others working in the field. What would be wonderful, he thought, would be if a group of practitioners could meet regularly to share experiences about their work.

This idea was taken seriously by the Network’s Executive Director Virginia Dorgan who recognized that among all the dialogue projects in the New York region, there was none where practitioners could gather to share knowledge, ideas, hopes and expertise as well as the dilemmas that they face. The organization was able to obtain funding for six sessions of a Dialogue Facilitators Networking Group (DFNG) from a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary Ministry Fund. The proposed DFNG would include a writer who would capture the insights of the group and present them in a booklet for others interested in introducing dialogue into their work.

In due course, the group met, and here is the booklet. In these pages, readers will be introduced to ten extraordinary practitioners of dialogue who participated in this series of meetings along with Pamela Zivari, the Network’s facilitator of the sessions, and myself as the recorder of the proceedings. Through their descriptions of the work they do and their reflections on it, readers can gain insight into the role that dialogue can play in helping people build respectful and compassionate relationships

in our homes, workplaces, communities and the world.

A world where dialogue is widely practiced would not be free of conflict. In fact, practitioners in our group agreed it would be a dull place without clashes of viewpoints. But such a world would mean there would be a better chance that differences could be worked out without violence and warfare.

What do we mean by the term “dialogue” and can it really contribute to peace? My dictionary gives as the first definition “a conversation between two or more people.” It also says it may be “an exchange of ideas or opinions.” This sounds like what people do all the time – talk and argue – and we still have violence and war. How does dialogue as we at the Network conceive it differ from the conversations people ordinarily have?

One way it’s different is that in dialogue people make an effort to listen deeply to one another. During a conversation, instead of thinking of what he or she is going to say next while someone is talking, in dialogue participants give their full attention to the speaker. The intention is not to persuade or convert other people to one’s own way of thinking but simply to listen and try to understand other viewpoints. Dialogue differs from debate in that way. It is not a competitive activity.

The key word in our dictionary definitions is “exchange.” My dictionary says exchange means “to give and receive in a reciprocal manner.” Dialogue participants must enter it on an equal footing.

Where there are structural differences in power or authority between parties to a dialogue, as between a parent and child, teacher and student, employer and employee, a large powerful nation and a small one, special conditions and ground rules must be agreed upon so that the dialogue can take place as between equals.

The ground rules typically consist of guidelines about how people speak to one another, for example to avoid accusing

Acknowledgements

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or blaming others and to use "I messages," that is to speak about their own feelings and point of view. In some cases, the situation requires a neutral space and a facilitator or mediator.

At its best, dialogue contributes to building connections among people. As Daniel Yankelovich remarks in his book *The Magic of Dialogue*, "To [the philosopher and theologian Martin] Buber we owe the stunning insight that...dialogue expresses an essential aspect of the human spirit. Buber knew that dialogue is a way of being. In dialogue, we penetrate behind the polite superficialities and defenses in which we habitually armor ourselves. We listen and respond to one another with an authenticity that forges a bond between us."

We can learn much about conducting dialogue in different ways and in different circumstances from the practitioners in this booklet. Although their methods vary, all are concerned with forging bonds among people.

Deborah Zarsky informed our group about how she uses dialogue as a basis for conflict resolution. **Laurence Berg** presented a survey of different dialogue approaches. **Jeffery Huffines** told us how he has used principles of dialogue at the UN. **Hesther Weisberger** informed us about a brave attempt to confront the persistent personal damage of the Holocaust through dialogue. **Esther Farmer** demonstrated ways that people can "perform" new ways of being rather than just talking about change. **Kathleen Kanet** let us in on the challenges of working with young people in a dialogic way. **Kathleen Freis** talked about communication among philanthropists of diverse backgrounds and contexts working for justice and equality. **Virginia Dorgan** offered some advantages of conducting dialogue online and provides the Network's criteria for high quality dialogue. **Susan Cushman** discussed how she uses dialogue in the classroom and in her work as a peace activist. **Mary Fridley** described her work with organizations that use performance to help

adults and young people to grow and develop. **Pamela Zivari** described her job at the Network for Peace through Dialogue.

In addition to introducing these practitioners and their work, this booklet will describe some useful exercises conducted in the series of meetings and summarize some of the questions that arose during discussions.

I hope you will enjoy reading this booklet as much as I enjoyed attending these sessions.

-- Peggy Ray

ogy by participating in a short exercise. Then, feedback was elicited on that experience.

At the last session, we conducted an intensive participant evaluation. The responses verified that the participants greatly appreciated and benefitted from the experience. It also revealed some suggestions for the next DFNG series which we plan to implement. Specifically, program expansion will include: 1) clients of the various practitioners bringing their experience and perspective, 2) a better gender balance in the next group (ten of the twelve were women); 3) a “field trip” where the group visits someone’s work and then discusses it at the next session; 4) a discussion board so that if someone has a challenge they can post it and be assisted by other group members; and 5) a series of “training modules” with fishbowl exercises so that participants could critique each other’s practices.

--Pamela Zivari

tributed greatly to creating an atmosphere of openness and friendship in the group.

A primary goal in the first session was to establish a sense of trust. To that end, participants were invited to introduce themselves by bringing to the meeting an object that represented something they felt passionately about. The stories they told about their lives through their relationships to the objects they brought led to laughter, even some tears, along with their recognition of one another's essential humanity.

The group also adopted a set of agreements for conducting the meetings borrowed from the Public Conversations Project. They were:

1. We will speak for ourselves.
2. We will avoid making grand pronouncements.
3. We will refrain from characterizing the views of others in a critical spirit.
4. We will listen with resilience.
5. We will share airtime and refrain from interrupting others.
6. We will "pass" or "pass for now" if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question.
7. If asked to keep something confidential, we will honor the request.
8. We'll avoid making negative attributions about the beliefs, values and motives of other participants.
9. We'll use email only for scheduling.

An additional agreement was proposed in the group: We will invest our time and energy to learn from each other.

As the first session was intended to develop personal confidence and trust in the group, the second session was designed to familiarize participants with one another's professional experience. Members were asked to describe the client base they served, their methodology and a typical, professional undertaking. Most remaining sessions contained an "exercise" segment in which participants were familiarized with a particular methodol-

THE DIALOGUE PRACTITIONERS

Dialogue and Conflict Resolution

Deborah Zarsky is a lawyer who pursues justice outside of the courts. While in legal practice, she found that helping clients to resolve their disputes through mediation was more satisfying and closer to her personal values than litigating the arguments. Nowadays, she works for Consensus, a for-profit organization that specializes in mediation and negotiation in a variety of settings. It also conducts peace-building work abroad, by, for example, collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in East Timor and working with youth peace-builders in Lebanon.

During a DFNG session, Deborah described mediation work as involving "an awesome encounter" between or among people with differences of opinion and belief. She might facilitate a conversation between people who have been fighting for a long time. Mediating requires her to listen well, to reflect back to those involved what she has been hearing and to delve into feelings. She thinks of that process as dialogue. The magic, she said, is that when you get to problem solving, the dialogue has paved the way for it and made it much easier.

Deborah identified some key elements for conducting successful dialogues and mediations. Most importantly, they require a certain basic orientation, and that is to view others as subjects, not as objects. The aim is to connect people, one human to another, with respect and compassion.

Openness and curiosity also contribute to successful dialogue. Persons entering a dialogue must come into the conversation open to the possibility of being persuaded, even though in the end they may not be. The point of dialogue is not to change other people, but only to understand their situations as deeply as possible. People can speak their own truth. If they are having

trouble, a mediator helps them out.

Mediators must maintain neutrality, inserting themselves as little as possible into the proceedings. They can't have a vested interest in the outcome. Simple caring and kindness are important qualities. Deborah tries to keep in mind a saying of the Jewish philosopher Philo: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle." No matter how annoying or upsetting a person is, you can think about what they have been through. It's important to be completely present and to communicate to those in a dialogue that you are genuinely there. She said that Buddhism has helped her develop more compassion and empathy.

In one of our meetings, Deborah described some of the items in her dialogue "toolbox." In the limited time we had available, she could touch on these only briefly.

First, summarizing and asking clarifying questions is a key skill. In summarizing, listeners feed back to speakers what they have heard with phrases such as "It seems like you are saying..." or "It sounds like this is the value..." When you acknowledge what someone is saying in this way, you can see people relax, Deborah said. People need to feel heard since they are rarely listened to well in their ordinary life. Once listeners have summarized what speakers have said, they ask questions to expand their understanding or to deepen the conversation.

Second, it is important to understand the different ways in which disputes can be framed, depending on the language used by those concerned. As described in a handout from Learning Laboratories, in a negative frame the language is loaded, adversarial, accusatory, positional, absolute. In a neutral frame it is unloaded with a problem-solving focus. A mutual frame provides a context for those involved that is inclusive, emphasizing commonality or universality. Using a positive frame, the language centers on values such as respect, honesty, effective communication, ethics.

this booklet has provided readers with a better understanding of the possibilities and some ways it can be conducted. We are greatly indebted to all the participants of the DFNG for sharing their professional knowledge and for their willingness to talk openly about the challenges involved in practicing their art. We cannot thank them enough.

Afterword

The Dialogue Facilitators Networking Group required a great deal of organization and forethought. It was a balanced program of structured learning and spontaneous connections which took place among a methodologically diverse group of practitioners. Below is an overview of the process.

First, Network for Peace through Dialogue staff selected participants. Using a list of over 100 "Why Dialogue?" attendees, we invited 35 from a variety of organizations in the New York City region and mailed them applications. Of those, fifteen applied. We reviewed these applications with an eye to selecting participants with a mix of experiences diverse enough to be mutually enriching yet similar enough that the participants could understand and learn from each other.

After narrowing the list to ten and informing the individuals of their acceptance into the program, we surveyed them through telephone conversations with each one. We asked what they hoped to gain from the DFNG experience; what they wished to work on. We also asked about possible food allergies. Since most people would be coming to the meetings directly from work, we were planning to offer a light supper. As it turned out, the time people spent eating together before each meeting con-

In Conclusion

The six sessions of the DFNG left participants with an appetite for more. In their evaluations, members said they had enjoyed the comradeship of sharing information and experiences with their peers. Each member had brought many talents and skills, wide-ranging and deep, into the group. They noted that it is rare to find a place where practitioners can find on a regular basis support and validation from others who understand the rewards and challenges of their work. All expressed a desire to keep in touch with one another in the future, professionally and personally.

One participant said that the group reminded her of the virtues of open-mindedness and empathy. Another welcomed the opportunity to bask in the warmth of spending an evening with like-minded people. A third said that participating in the group confirmed her desire to help build a culture of peace.

The goal of Network for Peace through Dialogue is to increase the use of dialogue in situations that separate people. We believe that the practice of dialogue is transformational in that it necessitates a kind of equality as well as a respect and openness to others. There are no winners and losers in dialogue. To live in peace we need to understand how others think and what their primary values are. Then we can cooperate on solutions to problems we share.

In the evaluations, participants provided suggestions for a second series of meetings, which some indicated they would like to join. Incorporating feedback gained from the first series, DFNG II will be even more experiential, with skill-building exercises designed around the real-time professional problems that participants are currently facing in the workplace.

At the Network for Peace through Dialogue, we hope

For instance, those involved in a dispute can speak of “what they don’t want” (negative frame), “topics for discussion” (neutral frame), “what we both or all want” (mutual frame), or “what we value” (positive frame). They can regard themselves as “disputants or parties” (negative frame), “Bob and Karen” (neutral frame), “neighbors, parents, partners” (mutual frame) or “participants” (positive frame).

Third, successfully facilitating a dialogue requires the ability to detect underlying feelings. Deborah has found helpful a list of needs and values common to all people that was inspired by the work of Marshall Rosenberg and published by The New York Center for Nonviolent Communication. The list itemized needs for connection, honesty, play, peace, physical well-being, meaning, and autonomy.

Additional Information

Books:

Being Peace, Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press

The Crossroads of Conflict: A Journey into the Heart of Conflict Resolution, Kenneth Cloke, Janis Publications, Inc.

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most, Douglas Stone, Bruce Patten and Sheila Haan, Penguin Putnam, Inc.

Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life, Marshall B. Rosenberg, Puddle Dancer Press

Websites:

Consensus: www.consensusgroup.com

Learning Laboratories: www.learninglaboratories.org

New York Center for Non-violent Communication:
www.nycvc.org

A Survey of Dialogue Processes

Laurence Berg worked for Human Rights First as their Training Coordinator. In a previous job with the American Friends Service Committee, he compiled and published a directory of organizations using various approaches to dialogue. In discussing the dialogue field in a DFNG session, he noted that some dialogue methods aim simply at exploration of issues and mutual understanding, others are designed to improve relations among groups in conflict, and still others intend to form a basis for decision-making, problem solving or collaborative action.

He provided the DFNG with an overview of the field and recommended consulting the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation website for further information on different types of dialogue, organizations employing them, and the ways in which they can be used most profitably. For our group, he illustrated the range of possibilities by describing some well-known approaches.

For exploration of issues and/or a search for mutual understanding, he gave as examples Appreciative Inquiry, Compassionate Listening, Conversation Café, Public Conversations Project and World Café.

Appreciative Inquiry is a powerful tool in which a facilitator helps a group build on positive aspects of a situation instead of looking at problems. Participants are encouraged to speak about what they can appreciate about where they are. Shifting perspectives from concern with deficits to a focus on strengths can open up new ways of thinking. Group members are invited to think of a time they were operating at their peak, giving a specific example, image or idea. This process requires a trained facilitator.

Compassionate Listening was developed in the context

cept the offer made to him/her and changed the direction of the story. This usually results when someone is thinking of what he/she wants to say before listening to what is being offered by the previous speaker. One person commented that people talk past one another all the time and not negating one another in daily life would make a world of difference.

One-word stories. Players practiced improvisation again in this exercise during which each person added one word to a sentence or sentences in order to make a story as they went around the circle. Prepositions and articles counted as words.

Because of time limitations, we were not able to discuss these exercises in detail, but Esther pointed out that they are listening exercises as well as developers of community.

Detailed instructions for using such games can be found in *Unscripted Learning*, by Carrie Lobman and Matt Lundquist, Teachers College Press, 2007.

ers got through the exercise perfectly by calling out the numbers very quickly. When required to go more slowly, it took them several tries to get to 10.

Mirroring a partner. We formed pairs, an A person and a B person. The A person was to perform a series of motions with the B person following. Then roles were reversed. This required paying very close attention to a partner's gestures, large or small.

Improvisation. Before we began to improvise a story as a group, Esther introduced us to several basic principles of improvisation.

1) Improvisation is about giving and receiving conversational offers. Everything someone says to you is an offer.

2) Don't negate, figure out how to accept what is offered.

3) You want to make the ensemble look good. You have to feed back into the story something another person could answer.

4) Think "yes, and...." When someone passes the story on to you, your first line is always "yes." You accept the offer and add your contribution.

Esther instructed the group that for improvisation to work, players have to forget the important things they think they have to say and remember to make the people who speak before and after them look good. They have to avoid non-sequiturs. The goals are to make the story cohesive and for the whole group to look good. Building relationships is more important than the content. She advised telling a group experimenting with improv to do something wacky, something fantastic, so that it's clear it is distinct from anything going on in the present. For instance, at a conference on AIDS she had people improvise on "Sex on Mars."

We reformed our circle. After we had done one improvisational go-round, we deconstructed the result. Esther told us to look for breaks in the conversation, where someone did not ac-

of the conflict in Israel and Palestine. It began with "citizen diplomats" who went to the region to offer themselves as listeners to people on both sides of the conflict. The listeners allowed others to talk without any expectation of having a turn to speak themselves. They were trained to "listen from the heart," even to people with views diametrically opposed to their own. The theory is based on the writings of Gene Knudsen Hoffman, a Quaker peace activist who believes that at the heart of every violent act is an unhealed wound that can be healed, in part, through nonjudgmental listening.

Over the years, The Compassionate Listening Project has developed an array of programs enabling people to use compassionate listening skills in any setting. There are daylong workshops, advanced-training sessions, and facilitators who bring the techniques to workplaces and other situations.

Conversation Café began when a woman who wanted to get beyond superficial conversation called a friend she knew she had differences with and suggested they meet in a café to talk more deeply. It worked so well they decided to invite others to join them. Word spread and Conversation Café was born. The process is kept deliberately simple. Everything you need to know to run a café is on a business card containing the agreements participants are asked to make and a description of the basic format of the meeting. Conveners use talking sticks for a couple of go-rounds during which each person talks in turn without interruption. Then the meeting is opened to "spirited dialogue" in which people can speak in no particular order. This process does not work if everyone agrees so it's critical to bring together folks with different views.

Public Conversation Project brings together people with conflicting views in an organized way to move them beyond polarization and stereotyping. In small groups, participants address such questions as "What is the issue for you?" "What is the

disagreement for which you want clarification?” The method is to ask good questions which open doors to new thinking. PCP regularly offers trainings in how to use their methods.

Facilitators thus trained have stepped into tough situations, such as bringing together people from opposing sides of the abortion debate. One situation in which Laurence himself used their methods was with groups of police and social workers from Northern Ireland.

World Café intends solely to generate new ideas, and, like Conversation Café, you don’t have to have extensive training to use the process. It requires only tables, paper and crayons. There can be four or five people at a table, though in a recent demonstration at a conflict resolution conference there were eight or ten at a table. Facilitators create a series of questions, each one getting into more depth and becoming more personal. People use their crayons to doodle or write things down on the papers as they talk. They move to different tables with each new question so there is a cross-fertilization of viewpoints. Sometimes there is a host at each table. Sometimes people are asked to share something someone else has said. Everyone is thought to have something to contribute to the conversation. If you need to solve a problem, you need to use (or add) a different process.

Some other dialogue formats enable participants to study and discuss public policy issues. Two notable ones are:

National Issues Forum brings people together in either large or small groups to discuss public policy. The organization provides workbooks on a given issue so that there is some structure to the conversation. The workbooks typically present three different viewpoints on the issues and are designed to be non-partisan, but in creating the specific viewpoints in advance, the conversation may remain more partisan than necessary. People sit in a big circle and are expected to be able to speak up. The conversations are a one-time event, usually.

wanted to continue to build the relation she was starting with those in her small group. She said it felt like picking clothing from a rack, trying it on and then putting it back.

Community-Building Exercises. Esther Farmer led us in the following theater games which she uses in her work with community groups. They are designed to take people out of the limitations they might imagine for themselves and the preconceived notions they might have about other people. Instead, playing the games creates a “mistake-free” environment in which people can create new ways of being and interacting without fear of embarrassment or humiliation. In all of them, the players must bring their attention to the whole group as well as to individuals in it. The DFNG players joked and laughed a lot during the exercises.

Red Ball, Blue Ball. In this game, the group first formed a circle. Esther told the group we were going to play catch with an imaginary red ball she was holding in her hands. After making eye contact with a person in the circle, Esther tossed out the imaginary ball as she called out “red ball!” The recipient was to quickly pass the ball to someone else, making eye contact and calling out “red ball.” In order to play this game effectively, everyone had to be aware of the whole group at the same time they watched carefully to see if the person with the ball would toss it their way next. After the group had done this a few times, a blue ball and then a green one was added to the mix to make the game even more challenging.

Count to 10 as a group. Players in the circle counted from one to ten with one person at a time in no set order calling out the numbers in the sequence. If two people called out the same number at the same time, the game had to begin again. The challenge, again, was to pay close attention to the group. The DFNG play-

The questions were to be written down and handed to the speaker who would then reflect on the questions and report how effective he or she thought the questions were in terms of shutting down or opening up new thinking.

They offered an example of how this might go: The speaker tells a story about being close to an aunt whose mother has passed away. She has a sense that her aunt, in taking charge of the situation and managing everyone else's needs, is ignoring her own. The speaker's experience caring for her own mother who had Alzheimer's Disease has left her concerned for her aunt. Possible questions: What does it mean to you to be there for your aunt? Have you had a situation in the past of being there for her? What would you like to see happen? Do you have a sense of what you need in the situation?

A discussion reflecting on the exercise followed practice in the groups of three. Some thoughts: So much of questioning is finding facts or solutions to problems, how to get from A to B. This is not like that. The questions are designed to help a person evaluate a situation and, if possible, develop new insights into it. It's a challenge to avoid getting caught being judgmental, and it's good discipline to get out of your own head so you can ask a question that's not about you.

One person commented that seeing how others might view the situation she described did lead to a shift in her viewpoint. Another said that since she usually talks to people who support what she already thinks, the questions helped her see her situation in a different way.

However, in one group, a person didn't feel the questions she was asked were completely detached from the questioners' points of view, although she found them interesting anyway. To her, the exercise also was frustrating because she was restricted to telling her reactions to the questions rather than responding to them. She didn't want to be stuck just hearing the question but

Everyday Democracy (formerly called Study Circles) is a community change organization. They support groups to bring together community members for meaningful dialogue on pressing issues. They also offer workbooks in the form of study guides that provide background information to participants. They are available to come to your community and help you organize discussions on difficult issues such as poverty, incarceration and family problems. In addition, they have informational resources on-line that can be downloaded.

Additional Information

Websites:

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation:

www.thataway.org

Appreciative Inquiry:

<http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu>

Compassionate Listening:

www.compassionatelisting.org

Conversation Café: www.conversationcafe.org

Public Conversations Project:

www.publicconversations.org

World Café: www.theworldcafe.org

National Issues Forum: www.nifi.org

Everyday Democracy: www.studycircles.org

Using Dialogue at the UN

Jeffery Huffines represents the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the U.S. at the United Nations, where he has been elected to serve as chair of the Executive Committee of the nearly 1,700 Non-Governmental Organizations associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (UN DPI). In this role, he became involved in planning the 61st annual UN DPI/NGO Conference, an event that brought some 1,100 NGO representatives to Paris in September, 2008.

After Jeffery attended the Network's 2007 conference on dialogue, he was excited about the possibility of introducing new dialogic modalities into UN proceedings. This is not an easy task, he explained. Although the term "dialogue" is much used in the UN, the real thing does not take place very often. The UN is a large, bureaucratic organization where diplomats and UN officials are often prevented from engaging in genuine dialogue because they do not usually speak for themselves but on behalf of the policies of their respective governments or agencies within formalized rules dictated by diplomatic protocol. This reality underscores the importance of the participation of members of civil society whose purpose is to hold governments accountable to the commitments and promises they make at the UN.

Jeffery explained that the teachings of the Baha'i Faith provided him with a background that has helped him to facilitate dialogue at the UN. "If Baha'is had a sacrament," he told the group, "it would be something called 'consultation.'" For Baha'is, consultation is a distinctive method of non-adversarial decision-making. If there is a problem, everyone is encouraged to voice their opinion. However, once the idea is expressed it becomes at once the property of the group rather than that of any one individual or particular constituency. One must "surrender

As for what it felt like to be the listener in this process, one person said that listening without interjecting herself into another person's thought process gave her a sense of the speaker's authenticity. Another said she had been trained to show enthusiasm for whatever someone might be saying, but in the exercise she noticed how this can throw off the conversation. It was a good thing that she did not say what she was thinking in this case, because her partner was going in a completely different direction.

Not everyone found listening easy. A few questioned the value of listening without response. In the exercise there was no opportunity to ask questions, to express empathy or sympathy, to make the exchange a way of creating something together. Yet others insisted that they could sense the listener's good will even without speech.

Creating Questions in Service of the Asked. Deborah Zarsky and Laurence Berg led the group in an exercise they learned in trainings of the Public Conversations Project. We formed groups of three. They instructed us that everyone in the group would have a turn to tell a story reflecting a dilemma he or she was experiencing. It was to be short, giving only essential facts. After listening to a person's story, the others in the group were to formulate a question for the speaker that might help him or her see the situation in a new way. The question could not be advice or suggestions for a course of action disguised as a question. It could not imply judgment of the person telling the story, the dilemma or of other characters in the story. It should not suggest anything that would leave the speaker feeling stuck, self-blaming, helpless or disempowered. Instead, it should help move the speaker toward choices he or she could make, open up thinking, and lead toward hopes and dreams.

Useful Exercises

Deep Listening. Pamela Zivari led an exercise using a process from the Compassionate Listening Project that she regards as a powerful tool in establishing comfort between those in a dialogue, increasing understanding of their shared humanity. She instructed the DFNG members to form pairs in which they would take turns of five minutes each during the exercise. First Person A was to answer the question “What concerns me most in my life at this moment is” Person B’s role was simply to be present and connected to the speaker, listening but not responding with words. Then the roles were reversed: Person B answered the question while Person A gave complete attention without speaking.

After doing the exercise, we discussed our reactions. Pamela asked the group what it felt like to speak and what it felt like to listen.

One person compared the exercise to an essay she had recently given her students to read. In it, different styles of conversation were compared to sports. The Western style was compared to a tennis match, with the conversational ball moving back and forth. The Japanese style, on the other hand, seemed more like bowling with one person taking a turn and then another. The exercise to her felt like experiencing the Japanese style.

In answer to the question of what the experience had been like for them, a few people said that listening was easier for them than speaking. It was sometimes hard for people to talk because they felt they didn’t have anything to say, but after beginning to speak despite this feeling, they discovered thoughts they didn’t know they had. There is a power in saying thoughts aloud that might otherwise lay dormant. It can be helpful just to slow down the thinking process.

ego.” In so doing, when there is a clash of differing opinions, the spark of truth will emerge. Consensus is encouraged whereby everyone either agrees with the outcome or agrees to put aside their personal reservations following a majority vote. An important element of this process is that once the decision is made, everyone must get behind it with the understanding that if the decision is wrong it will become evident in its implementation. In this process, dialogue is integral to achieving agreement.

The annual UN DPI/NGO conference is the premiere civil society event of the year dedicated to bringing NGO representatives together from around the world to consult upon issues of common concern. The 2008 conference marked the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and aimed to raise awareness among the worldwide NGO community of the importance of human rights in all facets of NGO work.

Principles of dialogue fitted nicely into this context, and Jeffery was able to encourage conference planners to introduce changes into the usual lecture format. For the first time, experts on round-table panels were asked to put aside their prepared lectures and were given guidelines designed to make their sessions more conversational. Presenters were expected to speak extemporaneously in response to questions taken from the audience by a moderator. The five large round-tables were followed by smaller breakout groups where people could interact more directly with one another. NGOs were also encouraged to emphasize participation and dialogue in midday workshops they presented. In the feedback from participants afterward, participants indicated that they did feel the result was more dialogic.

Jeffery emphasized that with all of his contacts, whether they be diplomats, NGO representatives or student interns, he makes an effort to speak to each person’s core humanity rather than as a mere occupant of a particular role. He shared the perspective that respecting people’s essential humanity regardless of

their status has made him a more effective NGO representative. He has also learned that conflict in itself is not a bad thing. It provides an opportunity for a discussion. A member of the group commented that creating relationships among opponents was often more effective than establishing who was “right.”

Additional Information:

Websites:

Baha’is of the United States: www.bahai.us

On consultation:

<http://info.bahai.org/article-1-3-6-3.html>

UN DPI Conference website:

<http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/conference/home.shtml>

5. Action and Change

How can we increase the likelihood that D&D engagement streams of “exploration,” “conflict transformation,” and “collaborative action” will result in community action? How can we increase the likelihood that the “decision making” engagement stream will result in policy change? What can we learn from promising D&D efforts that did not result in the action or policy change desired?

Due to time constraints, discussion of this list was not lengthy. However, everyone agreed that all of the issues seemed to be interrelated, but that Point One about addressing bias and inclusion should have the highest priority with Point Five, action and change, coming next.

For more information, consult NCDD’s website: www.thataway.org.

cussed briefly. The challenges were:

1. Bias and Inclusion

What are the most critical issues of inclusion and bias right now in the dialogue and deliberation (D&D) community and how do we address them? What are the most critical issues related to bias, inclusion, and oppression in the world at large and how can we most effectively address these issues through the use of dialogue and deliberation methods?

2. Framing D&D in an Accessible Way

How can we “frame” (write, talk about, and present) D&D in a more accessible and compelling way, so that people of all income levels, educational levels, and political perspectives are drawn to this work? How can we better describe the features and benefits of D&D and equip our members to effectively deliver that message?

3. Embedding D&D in Our Public and Private Systems

Most civic experiments in the last decade have been temporary organizing efforts that don’t lead to structured long-term changes in the way citizens and the system interact. How can we make D&D values and practices integral to government, schools, organizations, etc. so that our methods of involving people, solving problems, and making decisions happen more predictably and naturally?

4. Evaluation – Demonstrating that D&D Works

How can we demonstrate to power-holders (public officials, funders, CEOs, etc.) that D&D really works? Evaluation and measurement is a perennial focus of human performance/change interventions. What evaluation tools and related research do we need to develop?

Dialogue and Personal Healing

Hesther Weisberger is a clinical social worker by profession, but her interest in joining the DFNG came out of her participation in One-by-One, a non-profit group founded by people whose lives have been deeply affected by the Holocaust. The multigenerational membership consists of Holocaust survivors and their descendents; perpetrators, bystanders, resisters and their descendents, and other concerned individuals.

A single dialogue group might bring together Jewish survivors, German perpetrators, Polish Catholic slave laborers, resisters and the descendents of any and all people who were and continue to carry wounds from that tragedy. There is an attempt to have an equal number from each constituency in a particular group. To quote from a One-by-One brochure “One by one we seek out the humanity in one another’s stories of pain, guilt, fear and loss. As the stories resound within us, the burdens are lightened and we begin to transform the impact of our legacies, offering hope to future generations....”

The daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Hesther had participated in other second generation survivor groups before joining One-by-One, but there were areas of her experience she had felt unable to discuss. She found in One-by-One an opportunity to meet others who had undergone similar experiences and were willing to bring them into the open.

Most of the dialogues have taken place in Berlin, Germany. They usually last for five days. People arrive the weekend before and stay in homes donated by residents of the host group. In a typical session, 14-16 people meet in a circle. The question “How has the Holocaust or the Nazi regime affected you?” is asked. Each person has a chance to tell his or her family’s story and holds a stone while telling it. The rest of the

group listens. The recitations can be long – 30 to 45 minutes if needed. Many emotions – guilt, shame, anger – come up as survivors, perpetrators, resisters, etc. recount their stories from their different perspectives. Some participants are meeting persons with opposite experiences for the first time.

Hesther first participated in a group and later co-facilitated one. Although she herself finds the story-telling process wonderful, in the group she co-facilitated there were some who wanted to get beyond the simple telling of stories and into something more resembling psychotherapy. The One-by-One dialogue is not therapy, however.

Hesther has found that this process can produce personal growth. As people let go of their feelings, there can be relief from pain. There can also be personal blossoming. People make friendships, sometimes across differences. In her life, for instance, she has begun to work successfully with a former member of Hitler Youth.

Sometimes Jews will say, “How can you talk to these people?” Each person brings a different motivation to the group. For herself, it was a next step in her personal development. A friend participated because she didn’t want to pass along hatred to her children.

People usually hear about One-by-One by word of mouth, though there is a Speakers Bureau. Members are invited to schools, universities, cultural and religious institutions, radio and television programs in the U.S. and other parts of the world to share their personal legacies, to model respectful and compassionate dialogue, and to encourage genuine and provocative discussion.

Website: www.one-by-one.org

risks, so she had raised her question. Once her offering had been refused, she did not feel as engaged in the group as she had previously.

Since this is a common situation for a facilitator, the DFNG group spent some time looking at it from both the perspective of the facilitator and that of Person A. On the one hand, it’s hard for a facilitator to be in that position when she wants to stay focused on the agenda. The issue raised can take the meeting in an entirely different direction. That is the problem with agendas; there is always a question of what to let go.

On the other hand, it’s sometimes good when somebody in a group takes the risk of asking a question because it can happen that other people were afraid to ask it for fear of looking stupid. They are grateful if someone else takes the chance.

The group examined the possible choices for the facilitator. One option is that he or she can turn the question over to the group, asking such questions as, What should we do here? We seem to be behind on our schedule. Do we want to continue this? Is there another mode for pursuing this? What do we want to do next? Another option might be that the group could agree to look at the question raised but set a time limit, agreeing, for example, to spend five minutes on the new issue.

Still another possibility was that the facilitator could put aside the agenda and go along with the question. In that case he or she might say, That’s an interesting question. What were you thinking? What did you have in mind?

What are the biggest challenges for dialogue and deliberation?

A member of the DFNG had attended a national conference of the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD). She brought the group a handout listing five major challenges for the future identified by NCDD which we dis-

(<http://www.forum.foundation.org>). The Community Forum methodology created by the Forum Foundation invites the public into the governmental problem-solving process by engaging its citizens in a series of gatherings, two to four times a year. Organized around a significant issue on which the government needs feedback, these meetings are held in homes, libraries or offices throughout King County. The participants, dubbed “citizen councilors” by the government, learn more about an issue on which their input is vital such as evolving transportation needs, discuss it with the group and complete a detailed survey of their views. Using the Opinionnaire® responses, the program generates objective tabulated survey data that is communicated back to participants, to members of the Metropolitan King County Council, to other government officials, members of the media, and the general public.

What should a facilitator do if a group member introduces an issue diverting the discussion away from the agenda?

During one meeting, one DFNG member was facilitating discussion of a topic she considered important. After she had begun her presentation, another person in the group (let’s call her Person A) asked a question that she felt would be useful for the group to discuss. It seemed to the facilitator that the question would divert the discussion from what she regarded as a central topic of concern. She asked Person A to defer her question until the break and to take it up then informally.

The group went on with the agenda, but later in the meeting the question about the facilitator’s choice resurfaced. Person A said she felt a part of her shut down when she received that response. She had decided to risk asking the question because she thought her idea would build on ideas the group was developing. She believed that learning requires a willingness to take

Dialogue and Community Development

Esther Farmer trained in Social Therapy at the East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy. For many years, she was a housing manager with the NYC Housing Authority. Now she works through her own consulting firm, “Lateral Strategies.”

Esther sees her work as therapeutic, but not as conventional therapy. She challenged the group by expressing her reservations about dialogue as a route to change as she doesn’t think that talk alone always leads to building something. In fact, she thinks talk can sometimes get in the way, especially when people are invested in their opinion being right. She much prefers to have people “perform” new ways of being through improvisation and using language as creative activity.

Her argument became part of the group’s reflection on the concept of dialogue in general. We wondered. Don’t people sometimes communicate “dialogically” through art, music or even in silence? Is the essence of dialogue not in the words used, but in reaching for an underlying attitude of empathy?

Esther draws on the theories of Lev Vygotsky as advanced by Fred Newman and Lois Holzman. Vygotsky demonstrated that children develop by performing “a head taller than themselves.” Newman and Holzman posited that human beings are essentially performers. Esther pointed out that we all perform differently in different situations. She asked, “Do you walk the same way in your neighborhood as you do in other neighborhoods?” We learn new behaviors by performing them, even before we understand anything about them. At the same time we are still ourselves when we go beyond ourselves. The performance framework helps people grow because we can continuously become something new even as we remain who we are.

In working with community or tenant groups, she brings together people who often mistrust and have serious misconceptions about one another. Instead of talking about the differences, she uses improvisation as a method of getting people to interact in a way that is “assumption free.” Creating something new brings people together and enables them to focus on the community and what the community wants to do rather than on individuals. Competent community building takes place when people relate to others beyond themselves. As people perform being community builders they actually become that.

By getting people to play together, she is able to create a “mistake free” environment where they can experiment with different ways of looking at things and of behaving. They can feel free to do that because the whole idea is to be playful.

Esther put her theory into practice during the years she worked for the New York Housing Authority. One of her projects was bringing together young people who were involved in gang activity. Some of these young people had come out of prison and were involved in the drug trade. When she began working with them, there had been 12 deaths in a six-month period, but no one had thought to ask them how they felt about that. They were regarded as hopelessly bad and beyond consideration.

Previously, workers had only tried to talk to the “good guys.” She began to engage with the most troublesome gang members who had never been included in the community before. She worked with them over a two- or three-year period with good results.

She also brought together other parties in the housing project in which people were experiencing conflict: staff and tenants and caretakers and tenants.

In the section of this booklet on exercises conducted in the DFNG sessions, you will find descriptions of theater games Esther led the group in playing.

situation? Responses: It might help if people in the group have more contact with one another as one human being to another outside of business meetings where there is a pressure to get a lot done in a short time. A retreat was suggested. Luncheon meetings, perhaps getting committee members together in threes, were also suggested.

Members of the group acknowledged the difficulties in a situation like this one. Some comments were: When you are working with volunteers, some things may not happen the way you want, when you want. Also, there can be that tension between doing things for people and expecting them to take initiative.

Other workplace challenges brought up during the DFNG meetings were:

Dealing with a colleague who always knows the right answer and doesn’t want to hear other views.

Tensions among colleagues in a workplace where funding was being cut.

Resolving differences among colleagues who have contending views about how the mission of the organization should be fulfilled.

In these six sessions, the DFNG did not address such issues directly, but some of the exercises practiced in the group could help. One is the skill of listening deeply to others, another is asking questions that help people think in new ways. These exercises are described on pages 42-45. The Network also recognized that in another series of meetings, time could be spent profitably on such issues.

A DFNG member did report a promising example of dialogue in government systems she learned about at the National Conference on Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) in Austin, TX. The example was highlighted by John Spady, Deputy Volunteer Coordinator of Countywide Community Forums in Seattle, WA

firms using more advanced technology favored by the humanitarian organization. The locally produced equipment was less expensive and repair parts would be easier to obtain and install in the future. He did manage, though with difficulty, to persuade the humanitarian organization that using local suppliers would be the best course of action.

He was pleased to say that years later, when he visited the area, the wells were still in use. Such a successful outcome is not at all commonplace with international development projects.

When asked where the mutuality required for the dialogue came from on his side of the exchange, he said that it developed out of a growing understanding of the villagers' attitude toward death. For them, death was a part of life; when there is a drought, people die and that's the way things are. Why change what you are doing? His European-trained perspective was that death is a misfortune to be avoided. He felt he learned something important to him personally even though he was the "helper" in the situation. Probably this understanding of the villagers' attitudes toward death affected his dialogue with them as well since they eventually agreed to change their traditional practices of well digging.

How can dialogue be used in workplaces?

A DFNG member described challenges in his work heading a large committee that meets every month for two hours, with occasional conference calls among the officers. In this time frame, it was difficult to develop a sense of esprit de corps. He was also having problems creating subcommittees to do the work, and he found he is doing too much of it himself. He would like the group to be more participatory, to develop a sense of community and to have ownership of decisions.

He asked, how can you create dialogic modalities in that

Additional Information

Books and Articles:

Unscripted Learning, Carrie Lobman and Matt Lundquist, Teachers College Press, 2007

Vygotsky at Work and Play, Lois Holzman, Routledge, 2008

"From Passive Object to Active Subject: Young People, Performance and Possibility," Esther Farmer, Journal of the Community Development Society, Vol.39, no.2, 2008

"Community Development as an Improvisational Performance – A new Method for Understanding Practice," Esther Farmer, Journal of the Community Development Society, December, 2005 and reprinted in "Dramatic Action: Community Engaged Theater in Canada and Beyond", 2006, www.communityengagedtheater.ca

"Community Development as Improvised Performance – How a NYC Housing Project Turned Around," Esther Farmer, Progressing Planning magazine, Spring, 2004

Websites:

Esther Farmer's business website:

www.lateralstrategies.org

East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy: www.eastsideinstitute.org

Dialogue and Working with Youth

Kathleen Kanet is a member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, a Roman Catholic congregation of nuns. She is also a founding member of Network for Peace through Dialogue and current staff member. One of her current projects in the organization is a program for youth called “Confronting Concerns.” With the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child in mind, she incorporated the idea that youth have a right to participate in decisions affecting their lives into the program as a key principle. The goal was to get youth engaged in action for change and to do so at the very beginning of the process of developing the program.

Thus the process from the beginning has been intergenerational, with Kathleen, as coordinator, an adult organizer, and the youth working together. The methodology has been to create a collaborative work process, encouraging patience and honesty, emphasizing the importance of listening and maintaining good humor. The challenge for the two adults was keeping their mouths shut, listening and always trusting the group.

In the first year, several young leaders interviewed 100 of their peers in New York City’s Harlem community to identify the main issues that were bothering them. The youth leaders then recruited their peers for a series of three workshops where the young people could explore these topics together. They publicized the workshops with announcements at church and in school, helped with workshop planning and the set-up of workshops and assisted the adult workshop leader with workshop activities. The second year, they interviewed 100 more youth and prepared another series of workshops with the youth taking more leadership in workshop presentation. By the end of that year, they were able to lead a challenging intergenerational dialogue

them how to fish so they can provide for themselves, she noted that lots of people would rather just get the fish. Her approach would be not to do either, but to build community solidarity and then let the community figure out solutions.

During discussion about this incident in the DFNG, one person observed that what is developmental depends upon the context, the situation in a particular place. When the context is another culture, it is important to try to find ways to listen and observe the needs and values of that culture. Dialogue can be valuable for this. Asking the right questions is also important, as is seeing what we can build regardless of what we think is “right.”

As an example of how the mutuality of dialogue can result in more effective outcomes, one of the DFNG members who went to the conference in Germany brought up an incident she heard about there. A German man told the story of an experience he had some years ago in a village in Kenya that was having a drought. The traditional method of digging wells in riverbeds to get water was not working, and the European humanitarian organization he worked with sent him to the village to offer the expertise and money needed to build wells in new places. He believed that he needed to develop relationships with the villagers for this project to succeed and to do that there needed to be a sense of mutuality between him and them.

But could he have a dialogue with the villagers when the group he represented was supplying the money and information for the project and they were a materially disadvantaged group? He believed he had been successful in forming relationships that enabled the project to go forward. The villagers began to see the advantage of trying new ways of doing things, which they were at first resistant to do. Then, after talking to the villagers, he realized that it would be better to buy the equipment needed for the new wells from Kenyan suppliers rather than from the European

the parade-like nature of the KARAN contingent in the pilgrimage. She asked conference organizer Ute Wannig what she thought about the songs, banners, slogans, etc., used by KARAN to bring cohesion to the group, in the light of the German experience with Nazism. Ute said she'd thought about that, too, but the KARAN procession seemed all right to her because the spirit and intention were different from a Nazi demonstration or parade.

After the report on this conference, some in the DFNG commented that in the U.S. we tend to have an anti-group bias. We think: group/bad; individual/good. Yet our lives are led in groups. Groups -- communities -- are good when people are creating something together. In the U.S. team sports can bring out the best in people. However, they also set up an "us" vs. "them" bias.

Can dialogue contribute to resolving a tension between a desire to help others and development?

In one session, a DFNG member who teaches a class of international students described an interesting discussion that took place during a lesson on government and development. She found that people from different countries had completely different understandings of what the role of government should be. Canadians, on the one hand, felt the government should provide protective services to people who needed help. On the other hand, students from Uganda and India were completely unfamiliar with the idea that government should intervene in this way.

The teacher was interested in the tension between help and development. She suspects that extensive government protection of citizens can discourage volunteerism; people don't participate together creatively in the solutions to problems if solutions are provided for them ready-made. Referring to the adage about not providing fish when people are hungry but teaching

with a roomful of important adults in their lives about their chief concerns.

In the third year, 2008, the young leaders participated in a Leadership Institute in which, in addition to the leadership skills they had developed previously, they were trained to do workshop facilitation themselves. After five training sessions, they conducted a dialogue group with adults and several workshops for other young people.

There has been significant growth in the young leaders. At first, it was necessary to send out many reminders to get them to come to meetings, but by now they not only come, they show up on time. They are more confident in presenting themselves in every way, are more outspoken and take more initiative.

In answer to a question in the group about what actions for change the young people in the larger groups had taken, Kathleen said that it is an open question whether dialogue can be considered an action in itself or whether it will lead to action. One of the young people in the group was always asking, when are we going to have some action? Yet, taking a stand, challenging unkind actions, working to bring people together to learn and to consider their concerns, to listen to others, all in the long run do cause change, especially in those who take such leadership. This is the kind of action that the Leadership Institute is challenged to do.

Website: www.networkforpeace.com

Dialogue and Philanthropy

Kathleen Freis had just begun working at Synergos, a non-profit organization established to reduce poverty and increase equity around the world, when the DNFG began its series of meetings. Within the organization, she works in the Global Philanthropists Circle designing activities that increase understanding of global social justice issues by providing members with practical tools to sharpen strategy and to engage them in meaningful dialogue about their personal and professional experiences. One strong observation she had right at the beginning was that members deeply want to be connected to their work, particularly the individuals and communities they aim to support.

The Global Philanthropists Circle (GPC) consists of more than 200 individual philanthropists from more than 20 countries. Kathleen is responsible for shaping the GPC curriculum of offerings including workshops, retreats, learning journeys, and convenings based on approaches that have proven effective in reducing poverty and increasing equity. These approaches include personal transformation, bridging leadership, inclusive partnerships, and systems change. “We strive to facilitate discovery and ongoing reflection on one’s personal sense of purpose and direction in order to uplift agents of social change, helping them be more effective in the world,” Kathleen told the DFNG group.

Kathleen described her dialogue methodology as inquiry-based with the intention of increasing creativity and imagination and bridging possibilities. Participants listen and learn from each others’ experiences. She is also working across Synergos’ networks to integrate the GPC, Senior Fellows and Social Innovators in inclusive learning opportunities. Following is a theory of change to set up a perspective.

community? And what is the role of dialogue in that?

In one breakout session, KARAN, a Polish Catholic organization that runs treatment centers for young substance abusers, described an unusual component of their program that addressed those questions. Although their treatment does not promote any implicit or explicit religious belief, they do require that the young people and family members participate in a 9-day pilgrimage to the shrine of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa. The pilgrimage is the culmination of a long period of residential treatment for the young substance abusers and therapy for the families as well. This pilgrimage, a way of re-integrating the youth and their families into the mainstream of society, provided opportunities for informal dialogue of all kinds.

Each August, people from all over Poland make this pilgrimage. The Black Madonna is revered as a national symbol because she is believed to have helped to turn back an invasion of Swedes in the Middle Ages. There are also miracles attributed to her. The KARAN people wear special T-shirts, carry banners and sing along the way. Although it is traditional for people who live along the pilgrimage routes to help out the pilgrims with places to camp and occasional food, the group must travel with a truck containing their tents and stocked with food and other provisions.

The presenter said that the KARAN group created such a positive group spirit that Poles who at first eschewed the recovering drug abusers as being dirty and marginal now ask to join them in the procession. The KARAN pilgrims were welcomed by farmers and other Poles along the route who offered them places to set up their tents, food and other support. The bonding with others both inside and outside the procession was a crucial part of the experience for the KARAN pilgrims. Most importantly, the trip helped repair relations among family members.

One of the U.S. participants at the conference questioned

playing a flute and the other a guitar or an Irish harp, played Irish melodies. Participants were given sheets of paper and colored pencils and instructed to listen for the interplay between the two instruments as a kind of dialogue and to draw as they listened or write verbal impressions. Afterwards, some people shared stories that had been suggested to them by the music.

On Friday evening, a dance instructor led the group through some playful movement games with no speech involved. These were a great way for people to interact across language barriers. On Saturday morning, a theater games facilitator led improvisations in which small groups developed skits using costumes and props but wordlessly. On Sunday, a performance artist offered a dramatic interpretation of the events of the weekend, using a set and props he had devised from art materials that had been available for all to use at any time during the conference but, once again, without speech.

German, English and Polish were the primary languages spoken at the conference, but there was no single language understood by everyone. Although formal presentations were translated so everyone could follow them, it seemed to the DFNG members who attended the conference that the activities where people could interact with each other without using words were very important in creating an atmosphere of warmth and mutuality that was conducive to dialogue.

What is the relationship between dialogue and human development?

The “Dialogue and the Concept of Development” conference in Germany challenged the DFNG members who attended to explore their thinking about the meaning of “development” as well as about dialogue. For example, what is the connection between individual growth and development and the health of a

SYNERGOS THEORY OF CHANGE

Improving Social Conditions/Better Quality of Life



Systemic Change



Inclusive Partnerships

A mechanism to foster a new type or set of engagement(s)



Visionary Leaders

(Senior Fellows, Partnerships, Social Innovators, GPC Members, Staff)

Engage in personal, reflective work: explore purpose, develop wholeness and create a personal response in the work we do

Website: www.synergos.org

Dialogue and the Internet

Virginia Dorgan is a member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, a Roman Catholic congregation of nuns, and the director of Network for Peace through Dialogue.

One Network project that has particularly interested and challenged her has been developing a form of online dialogue. Years ago, when the organization was called Center of International Learning, she attempted to connect groups internationally by “snail mail.” Virginia said she had some success with this but she appreciates the speed with which messages can now travel.

The systems used to conduct online dialogue, called Shaping Our Future, have evolved over time. Some complicated methods have been replaced by a Google group, which has proved to be both easy to use and adequate for the dialogue’s needs. For purposes of confidentiality, the groups are closed. Eight to ten people are asked to post at least two entries per month. Although the Network once proposed the topics ourselves, now we look for ways for participants in the groups to suggest them. Each topic goes on for two or three months or as long as it can sustain interest. There is a coordinator who gathers the conversation group, introducing and closing the topics.

To determine if the online sessions were really dialogues, the Network decided to evaluate them through its principles of high quality dialogue. The findings were that the exchanges showed all of the elements of a high quality dialogue. Some of the principles were less used than others, but that happens in face-to-face dialogues as well. The conclusion was that indeed there can be online dialogues. Asked what the difference is between dialogue online and face-to-face, Virginia said that she thinks people have more time to think through their responses in an online dialogue and therefore come up with new insights.

Some others in the group had found ways that silence can contribute to dialogue. Moments of silence can be incorporated into any kind of meeting so that people have a chance to think about what they are going to say before they say it. A personal benefit is that silence can open up a space in the mind for a productive dialogue with oneself, a moment to ask questions such as, What is my intention? During collective meditation, one person suggested, silence can be seen as a form of respect to others.

Do the arts have a role in dialogue?

Two members of the DFNG attended a conference in Germany called “Dialogue and the Concept of Development,” a gathering mostly of groups from Germany and Poland, with additional representation from Cameroon, India, Romania and the United States. Ute Wannig, the primary organizer, opened the conference by saying that she wanted to expand our understanding of dialogue. She maintained that the usual definitions are too limited because they tend to be non-contextual. They also give the impression of being the last word on the subject.

She contended that dialogue at its core is about the relationship that is created during communication. That relationship can be created when people talk to one another, but it can also occur between a sculptor and the stone with which he or she works, between people who dance, between bodies. At the workshop, she wanted participants to experience different dimensions of relatedness, she said, the esthetic as well as the cognitive verbal dimension.

Therefore, the workshop provided opportunities for participants to get to know one another better through dance, music, theatrical improvisation and art as well as through speech. Instead of a plenary session on Friday morning, two musicians, one

Some Discussions

Interesting questions arose in the course of the DFNG meetings. No attempt was made to arrive at definitive answers to them, but summaries of a few of the discussions are included here as food for thought and further investigation.

Can the usual definitions of dialogue be expanded?

The word “dialogue” derives from the ancient Greek “dia,” meaning “through” and “logos,” meaning “the word.” One member of the DFNG asked whether what we mean by dialogue is that we make connections through speech. Her view was that, to the contrary, language can sometimes get in the way of clarity, quoting the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein who said that words can create “mental mists.” We look to words to provide understanding but she understands language as a kind of activity producing unpredictable results.

Most people in the group regarded speech as an indispensable means of conducting dialogue that they used every day in their work, but they were interested in exploring other possibilities.

Can silence promote dialogue?

This conversation originated when one member returned from a five-day meditation retreat where she experienced what she called “the power of silence.” She wondered if silence could be used in dialogue. In her experience of the retreat, conducted in silence, she found that people were able to form bonds even though they were not speaking. For her, the effects of group meditation were especially intense.

What Constitutes High Quality Dialogue?

Responses which show an honest expression of one’s own opinion:

- Participants express their own opinion rather than talking about “them” or in universal truths.
- Participants relate a similar feeling or story to what has been said.
- Participants state different opinions in a non-threatening way.

Responses which show empathetic and attentive listening:

- Participants paraphrase the others point of view.
- Participants ask clarifying questions.
- Participants make statements recognizing the feelings of the other.

Responses which show an effort to understand the other:

- Participants respond to others insights with questions, agreements or respectful disagreement.
- Participants do not try to convince others to change their point of view.

Responses which show openness and willingness to learn:

- Participants state whether they have learned from others.
- Participants acknowledge any changes in their points of view.
- Participants identify their own assumptions.

Dialogue in the Classroom and in Peace Activism

Susan Cushman teaches American literature, writing and Women's Studies at Nassau Community College and chairs the Peace Task Force at All Souls Unitarian Church in Manhattan. She brings these interests together in her classroom by exploring conflict and human rights issues with her students. She is also developing a course in peace studies where she will introduce the literature of the peace movement and look at issues of gender and war.

A member of what she called a "new guard" of teachers, her teaching methods are student-centered and based on dialogue. She employs group work a great deal and often has students working with partners. In her writing classes, creating dialogue is one way students explore differences of opinion. In preparing for persuasive writing, she asks students to perform role plays where they take different positions on controversial issues such as teaching birth control in the schools. Students must acknowledge others' positions and become familiar with the arguments of all sides.

The Peace Task Force at All Souls church was created after 9/11. There was concern in the congregation about whether a military response to that was the right thing to do and about the invasion of Iraq. Since then, they have had events on all kinds of justice issues – fair trade coffee, greening the church, torture, security and the Patriot Act, for example.

Website: www.allsoulsnyc.org

Dialogue and Network for Peace through Dialogue

Pamela Zivari, a Network for Peace through Dialogue's program director, has worked as a lawyer advocating for immigrants and as a communications director at a UN nongovernmental organization. In her legal training, she was attracted to mediation and concepts of restorative justice, and so when she attended the Network's 2007 conference on dialogue she liked what she heard. Afterward she learned of a job opening with the Network and applied.

The conference inspired her, she says, because people were excited to be there and committed to learning how to improve their peace-building skills. Now she is in charge of developing three peace-building programs: Living Room Dialogues, online dialogues and the DFNG.

What she likes about working in the Network office, she says, is the collaborative frame of mind she finds there and the commitment to making the world a better place. Even staff meetings can have a dialogic quality. The organization's promise, she believes, is that we can expand people's understanding of one another and as a result reduce discord.

Website: www.networkforpeace.com

possible through the generosity of more than 5,000 individuals as well as hundreds of corporations and foundations. Hundreds of volunteers also participate throughout the year in programs. Mary is one of those, producing shows at the center's Castillo Theater.

Websites:

East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy: www.eastsideinstitute.org

All Stars Project: www.allstars.org

Dialogue and Performance

Mary Fridley works as a fundraiser to pay the bills, but her passion is the work she does as a community organizer and activist. She works with the East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy, where she trained in Social Therapy, which she practiced for 12 years.

She said Social Therapy is a process in which people are asked to create something new and get beyond existing categories and assumptions. People are deprived of the experience of creating new emotional responses and have a limited view of what's possible, she said. In Social Therapy, what people create is the group. People walk in wanting help, but to have help they must create a group environment that allows everyone to challenge the assumptions they bring into every situation. People are conflicted, contradictions abound, but in a Social Therapy group they have to use conflict and difference to build something. Through performance, they can get beyond what exists. The process is playful.

The concept of making progress by playing works very well with youth. One project she has been involved with is the All Stars Project, which she described as the most successful youth performance movement in the country. To quote from its website, "The ASP creates outside of school, educational and performing arts activities for thousands of poor and minority young people. It sponsors community and experimental theatre, develops leadership training and pursues volunteer initiatives that build and strengthen communities."

In 1983, volunteers raised enough money from individuals to build the All Stars Performing Arts and Development Center on New York City's famed 42nd Street because they wanted to be independent of outside support. Today programs are made