

Dialogue:

Newsletter of the Network for Peace through Dialogue

Network for Peace through Dialogue (originally CIL) was founded in 1985 by people from the Philippines, the USA and Germany.



**Dialogue:
Newsletter of the NPD**

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NPD Plans Conference on Dialogue in June, 2007

Why dialogue? Do we engage in dialogue to solve conflicts? To deepen our understanding of people different from us? To challenge our thinking? To search for truth? All of the above?

What are the best ways to go about it? When is it useful? How effective can it be? How can the skills be taught and employed in educational settings? How can dialogue ease the strains of international conflict, globalization and rapid technological change?

These are some of the questions NPD expects community activists, researchers, teachers, and others to explore at a weekend conference next June. Representatives of organizations that employ methods of dialogue and want to share their practices will be invited as well as members of community, faith-based, activist and other groups who may be interested in learning more about the subject.

Collaborators

Representatives from Marymount Manhattan College, the Peace Education program at Columbia Teachers' College, American Friends Service Committee and others are collaborating with NPD in the planning process. NPD Executive Director Virginia Dorgan and Board Member Laura Fernandez are co-chairing the planning committee.

Although the conference certainly will take place at an educational institution in New York City, the precise location has not been decided.

While the final details are still being worked out, initial ideas include a panel or panels that would model dialogue skills; inspirational speakers; small, interactive workshops, and artistic contributions.

Opportunities for networking at the conference hopefully will spark further collaboration and research.

In the next few months, NPD will issue a request for proposals for possible presenters in order to assemble a diverse group whose knowledge will enhance our understanding and practice of dialogue.

New York City is a great location for this conference because of the wealth of local and international organizations located here with ideas and expertise to share.

Suggestions Welcome

Suggestions or input about the development of the conference are most welcome. Write to us at NPD@networkforpeace.com with your ideas. Planners also are hoping that you will be able to join us in person in June to continue the much-needed dialogue about dialogue.

From the Director **NPD's History of Fostering Dialogue**



Look at our logo with two profiles, one black and one white, with a peace laurel around them. This symbolizes our efforts to bring people and peoples face-to-face in dialogue.

Consider our ongoing programs — Communities in Dialogue (begun in 1994), Living Room Dialogues (begun in 1995) and this newsletter. The primary work of our organization from its inception has been to promote dialogue that we hope will foster new ways of bringing people closer together.

In 2002, as part of our Communities in Dialogue program, we sponsored an international workshop entitled “Neighborhood by Neighborhood: How Do We Build a Sustainable World?” Participants came together from the Philippines, Germany, Zimbabwe and the United States. A book documenting the dialogue model used for this project can be found under Publications on our website.

Open Space Technology

As organizers living in New York, our challenge was to open up the agenda so that we did not frame issues of environmental, social and economic sustainability solely from the point of view of people from a materially advantaged country. To solve this problem, we tried out the Open Space Technology format developed by Harrison Owen. This format enabled all participants to take leadership in developing the agenda.

Owen reasoned that people are more likely to think deeply, express themselves openly and act responsibly when addressing matters that they care passionately about. Participants, all of whom had been preparing locally for this international gathering, contributed topics that were then posted on a Community Bulletin Board where people could sign up for whatever most appealed to them.

When the groups thus organized gathered,

discussions were intense. Notes were taken in every group and posted on the wall so that everyone could follow all the conversations. At the conclusion of the workshop, each country group went home with several projects to implement or discuss at home.

Dialogue On-Line

In 2004 we received a grant to develop our website and along with this an opportunity to conduct a threaded dialogue on-line.

At the same time, our Communities in Dialogue Program, which had been involving adult community leaders, branched out to a youth component. We therefore developed on-line forums for both adults (Shaping our Future) and youth (Crossing Boundaries). In this way, there could be direct and instantaneous communication for groups from all points of the earth.

Intensifying Our Focus

With NPD's recent name change, we have been looking more closely at the nature and uses of

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Coming Up

October 26, 2006 – Recognition Night
at the Marymount School,
1026 Fifth Ave., NYC. 6-9 PM

Please save this date for a very special evening. We will honor Alice Rivlin (see article on p.5) and the Marymount School for their significant contributions toward practicing dialogue. We will have a live auction with Christies' Guy Bennett, as well as great company and good food. We need to increase our income from this event to support our on-line dialogues, our website, this newsletter and our upcoming conference on dialogue. For more information, call 212-426-5818.

Network for Peace through Dialogue is a 501(c)3 organization and depends on individual contributions. Any contribution you can make in cash, stock, or a bequest will help to further our work. The address and phone number are on the cover of this newsletter. Thank you.

NPD Criteria for 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 other's 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 other's insights with questions, agreements or respectful disagreement.

Participants do not try to convince others to change their points of view.

—Responses which show willingness to be transformed by the experience.

Participants state what they have learned from others.

Participants acknowledge changes in their points of view.

Participants search for and acknowledge their own hidden assumptions.

From the Director

(Continued from page 2)

dialogue. NPD president, Kathleen Kanet, and I have been attending a six-month workshop on outcomes management. In it, all programs consider the outcomes for participants and I was encouraged to define "High Quality Dialogue." With the help of experts in the field, I developed the definition shown in the box above.

In order to foster an exchange of information with others who are interested in promoting dialogue, NPD is sponsoring a conference on the subject in June 2007 (see cover).

The commitment of the Network for Peace through Dialogue has long been and will continue to be to contribute to peacemaking by providing opportunities for dialogue.

—Virginia Dorgan
Executive Director



Lillian Wall (l) and Leslyn Rigoni discussed the situation in Darfur at a June Living Room Dialogue after Maggie Ray, a researcher at the International Crisis Group, provided in-depth information.

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A Matter for Continued Dialogue

Following is a summary of some thoughts that were expressed during a dialogue that took place at an NPD international workshop in January, 2002. Like many dialogues, it raised more questions than it answered, and on this anniversary of the tragedy of September 11, we are still thinking about it. If you are moved to enter this dialogue yourself, respond by writing to us at NPD@networkforpeace.com with your comments. If there is interest, we will post the responses in our on-line forum.

Can We Be “Us” Without Hating “Them”?

Convener of the group: Larry Jones. *Participants:* Frances Amando, Virginia Dorgan, Ndaipaneyi Mukwena, Peggy Ray, Catherine Scerri, Lillian Wall.

Larry’s opening question: Especially following September 11, people seem to need an enemy to become a united America. Is that who we are? Do we need to hate somebody to be more ourselves?

Some responses:

Even though most people seem to applaud the government’s military response, some of us feel ashamed to be U.S. citizens at this time. In responding to our tragedy, many innocent people in another country are being injured and killed.

There has been a mixed reaction around the world. Some people were upset, others said, why is it such a big deal now that it has happened in America? Suffering happens every day in other places and no one here seems to care very much.

The destruction of the World Trade Center reflects how some people in the world feel about the U.S. as a symbol. But responding with anger is not productive; people should let it go. This is hard, especially for those who lost relatives and friends.

Americans can become terrorists, too. Some people were disappointed when investigators of the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City found Timothy McVeigh, an American, was responsible, and he wasn’t a “them.” Those people went quiet when they found out he was an “us.”

As children grow up, they are socialized into thinking about people as an “us” or a “them” on a smaller scale (e.g., families, schools). People want to feel connected to one another, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. For example, at sporting events we combine strongly, and this can be healthy.

Dividing people into an “us” and a “them” causes a problem when it is manipulated politically. Stirring up antagonism between people can be convenient to maintain political and economic institutions.

Often people want to feel better than other people. To counteract this, there has to be somebody in a group who will stand up for others. The leadership of a group may determine which way the group will go. There is a tendency to want to eliminate others to feel strong; therefore, leadership that recognizes our common humanity with all people makes a big difference.

Is the UN combining “us?” There is inequality in the UN, because it is now U.S.-dominated. However, there is some potential in the UN to be a forum for all countries to speak.

When continuing the dialogue, consider these statements and questions:

- The “war on terror” and the notion of a “clash of civilizations” have replaced the Cold War in creating a unifying “them” in American politics.
- We are all connected by the ecosystems of the earth.
- All identities are lies; we are better off without them. We are all human beings.
- Though this matter focused on an American tragedy, would reactions have been similar in other nations?
- What can be done to bridge the separations among people?

Some Thoughts About the Need for Dialogue

By Alice M. Rivlin

Alice Rivlin, Director in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution, is an expert in fiscal and monetary policy, social policy, and urban issues. She will be honored at NPD's annual Recognition Night on October 26, 2006. Following are excerpts from a speech she gave at Indiana University last year.

...Right now I am profoundly worried, even frightened, that our [the U.S. government] policy process will prove unequal to the task ahead. America appears polarized into non-communicating blocs that make us increasingly unable to engage in civil discourse about the big issues facing our country. We are shouting without listening; caricaturing each other, rather than looking for common ground. We are trying to score debaters' points rather than engaging in the dialogue that must precede the compromises that allow us to move forward. ...

How Great are our Differences?

First, how real is the perceived polarization? I am not a public opinion expert, but I have recently done a little digging around in the relevant literature. ... In sum, it is not at all clear that the country is actually becoming more polarized with respect to important policy issues. Indeed, the evidence suggests that there is a large and probably growing group of moderates or non-extremists on many important issues, including the "hot button" issues such as abortion and gay rights and the difficult fiscal issues such as Social Security, Medicare, and how to pay for government services.

Without any apparent increase in the polarization of the public's views on issues, however, political rhetoric has become more acutely partisan, and moderates in both parties are more reluctant to stray from the "party line." ... The media, of course, thrives on dissension—or thinks they do. ... But we can't blame the media for the current escalation in political partisanship, although they certainly fan the flames....

Do Americans Hate Politics?

My double colleague (both at Georgetown University and at the Brookings Institution) E.J. Dionne wrote a wonderful book over a decade ago called *Why Americans Hate Politics*. His thesis was that "most of the problems of our political life can

be traced to the failure of the dominant ideologies of American politics — liberalism and conservatism.... We are encouraging 'either/or politics' based on ideological preconceptions rather than on a 'both/and politics' based on ideas that broadly unite us....By putting such a premium on false choices and artificial polarization, our electoral process is making it harder and harder for electoral winners to produce what they were elected for: good government." (p. 11, 15)....

If we are going to move forward on policy issues, we need to get past the partisan rhetoric and engage in serious dialogue. We need to listen to each other, find common ground, and hammer out compromises that are nobody's first choice. That's not going to happen by itself....

A Different Mindset Needed

As Dan Yankelovich points out in his wonderful little book, *The Magic of Dialogue*, dialogue is very different from debate, and successful dialogue requires both a different mind set and a learnable set of techniques. In debate each side assumes there is a right answer and they have it; in dialogue the parties assume that many people may have pieces of the answer. In debate each side tries to win; in dialogue, the point is not to win but to resolve the issue or find a satisfactory policy. ...

Who can take the leadership in creating a new national commitment to constructive dialogue on public affairs—a commitment that actually transforms bickering and finger pointing into dialogue? Leadership is not likely to come from politicians....Leadership is even less likely to come from the media, who perceive that controversy attracts readers, listeners and viewers—and the more partisan and polarized the better.

So I nominate the public policy schools to organize a... national campaign to restore civil discourse and turn partisan posturing into dialogue.



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Participants engaged Harrison Owen's Open Space Technology model of dialogue at an NPD international workshop. See p. 2 inside for more information about this process. Pictured here are (l to r): Lily Flordelis (Philippines), Larry Jones (U.S.A) , Martina Gessner (Germany), Janice Hendricks (U.S.A.), Ute Wannig (Germany), and Ndai-paneyi Mukwena (Zimbabwe).