



Facilitated Dialogue

Dialogue is a mode of communication which invites people with varied experiences and often differing perspectives to engage in an open-ended conversation toward the express goal of personal and collective learning. Facilitated dialogue refers to a process “led” by a neutral facilitator. Facilitators use a combination of questions, techniques, activities and ground rules to ensure that all participants can communicate with integrity.

The Arc of Dialogue

Developed by Tammy Bormann and David Campt, the arc of dialogue structure pairs a common experience shared by all participants with a sequence of questions designed to build trust and communication, allowing participants to interact in more relevant and personal ways. It is structured around four phases:

PHASE ONE: COMMUNITY BUILDING

Phase One encourages connectedness and relationship-building within the group by creating a space where all participants can engage. During this phase the role of the facilitator is introduced, the intent of dialogue is explained, guidelines are established and all voices in the room are engaged. The questions posed are nonthreatening and allow participants to share information about themselves. Samples include: What makes you feel safe? When people ask you where you're from, what do you tell them and why? When you consider the word “justice,” what come to mind?

PHASE TWO: SHARING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Phase Two invites participants to think about and share their own experiences with the topic. The facilitator helps participants recognize how their experiences are similar and different. Questions welcome each person's experience equally and place minimal judgment on responses. They might include: What impact does immigration have on your daily life? How did you first come to understand race? Can you remember the first time you experienced or learned about “injustice?”

PHASE THREE: EXPLORING BEYOND OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Phase Three provokes participants to dig deeper into their assumptions and to probe underlying social conditions that inform our diversity of perspectives. They may be asked: Do all people have equal access to a ‘just’ legal system? Who should be welcome to immigrate today? Who should not be welcome to immigrate? What values inform your response to these questions?



PHASE FOUR: SYNTHESIZING AND CLOSING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

It is important to end a dialogue by reinforcing a sense of community. Phase Four questions help participants examine what they've learned about themselves and each other and voice the impact that the dialogue has had on them. Some questions include: What, if anything, did you hear in this conversation that challenged your assumptions? What, if anything, did you hear that confirmed your assumptions? Are there things you heard today that you want to understand better? What have you heard that inspires you to act more on this issue?

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience offers trainings in facilitated dialogue for members (at a special rate) and non-members. For more information, email Sarah Pharaon, Senior Director of Methodology and Practice, at spharaon@sitesofconscience.org.