

The Network for Peace through Dialogue  
in cooperation with **Marymount Manhattan College**

Presents

## **Dialogue In/As Action**

### **Structuring Dialogue for Youth Peacebuilding and Leadership Programs**



**Dr. John Ungerleider and Joseph Debiec**  
**SIT Graduate Institute**

John and Joseph explained the purpose and structure of their program. It targets youth in regions of conflict (e.g., Cyprus, Iraq, Northern Ireland, etc.) in order to cultivate leadership and dialogue practices. An equal number of youth from “each side” of a conflict are selected to participate (totaling around 28, to be broken down into 4 or 5 dialogue groups). The programs run from two to four weeks, with each day incorporating up to about two hours of structured dialogue work in the morning into days filled with team building exercises outdoors, art, music, dance, and food.

There are five structured dialogues over the course of five days with the same people in the same room with the same dialogue facilitator: Day 1 (similarities/differences), Day 2 (stereotypes), Day 3 (history), Day 4 (personal stories), Day 5 (re-entry/reunion/action). Each day throughout the week moves from lower to higher risk dialogues and they do not intend to surface unmanageable conflict or trauma. There is a strong emphasis on the need to build social connections, trust, and safety before facing conflict. Importantly, the facilitator has the students help construct their own norms for dialogue. The junior facilitators check in with the lead facilitator at the end of each day to touch base on how their respective groups are faring, and the lead facilitator flexibly modifies any activities

needed in light of this daily information, so that the program is tailored to the needs of each unique group.

The many purposes of these programs include building empathy, developing team-building skills, drawing out introverted people, cultivating intercultural communication skills and inclusiveness (gender, socioeconomic status, etc.), empowerment/finding one's voice, breaking down stereotypes, creating a safe setting, learning active listening, cultivate leadership skills, and challenging assumptions.

The second half of the session was devoted to experiencing what it is like to be involved in the opening day's structured dialogue. The group was large, so we broke down into two groups. We did a check-in where each person stated his name and what they did for a living. Then we went around the circle where we each stated one thing we learned at this conference so far, one hope we have for dialogue and one fear we have about dialogue, the most amazing and the most challenging dialogue experience we have had, one similarity and one difference that we noticed between ourselves and the other dialogue practitioners. We then had a check-out with each person offering any last closing thought on this experience.

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